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Exponential Futures:
Whig Poetry and Religious Imagination, 1670-1745

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Exponential Futures:
Whig Poetry and Religious Imagination, 1670-1745

by

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Epigraph

To really live, we should be dead too.
Isn't all our dread a dread of being
Just here? of being only this?
Of having no other thing to become?
Of having nowhere to go really
But where we are?

What power has the sun
If it must remain the sun?
We are afraid that one day the hand
Will not catch us when we come;
That the remorseless fingers will not close over us.

And I think that is our strongest will—
The reason all our dreams of paradise
Are dreams of an unlimited disorder
In a lawless anonymity.

— Kenneth Patchen, "Credit to Paradise"

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guessed that my scattershot reading would take me somewhere worth going, and whose support (particularly during my years in Austin) helped to get me there. Finally, I thank my wife, Emily Bloom, shepherd and sharpener of my best thoughts. I take boundless joy in imagining all the futures we can realize together.

Exponential Futures:
Whig Poetry and Religious Imagination, 1670-1745

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Supervisors: Lance Bertelsen and John Rumrich

My dissertation argues that the eighteenth-century Whig writers Elizabeth Singer Rowe, Edward Young, and Mark Akenside remake poetic futurity as they repudiate materialism. Against materialist thinkers who held that souls don't exist or are inseparable from bodies, the poetry of these English authors sings the freedom of the immortal soul. They far outstrip conventional apologetics, however, by imagining that the soul leaps out of the human body and into new angelic powers. The result is a claim about time: that the soul can separate from the body means for these poets that the future can break from the present. Yet they won't be patient for newness to come. Reshaping the discourse of enthusiasm, with its promise of ready access to the divine, they also insist that the separated soul's expansive potential can be claimed for present use. Their verse means to pull futurity's changes to the present, making available endless possibilities in advance. These writers accordingly complicate familiar scholarly narratives that portray English poetry and theology of their era as oriented to the past.

Rowe, Young, and Akenside instead propel souls forward and outward. Their heady visions reflect the Whig writers' political leanings and their calls for a modern English literary canon that transcends neoclassical values. Although they name Milton as their model and take up his forms and images, they rebrand their hero to conform him to their agenda. The

mortalist Milton holds that the souls of the dead can't persist without bodies: they must wait for a miraculous resurrection to return to consciousness and then God. By refitting Milton's poetic style to support an attack on materialism, his self-proclaimed successors rein in one aspect of his radical thought even as they amplify a different aspect. In their poems, inspired spirits needn't stand by for the end of time to be divinized. They already launch into new worlds, communing with other angelic intelligences and exulting in otherworldly passions. The Whig writers offer a far-reaching but surprisingly understudied defense of the poetry they reinvent. They declare that modern religious verse can allow poets and readers to raid the riches of an angelic future.

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Introduction: Contested Futurities

In "The Bard" (1757), Thomas Gray hearkens to British poetry's past while his eponymous speaker listens ahead from the late thirteenth century. The sounds of the prophesy trail off soon after the Bard picks up a few notes from *Paradise Lost*:

> A voice as of the cherub-choir
> Gales from blooming Eden bear;
> And distant warblings lessen on my ear,
> That lost in long futurity expire.[1]

It's hard to share in Gray's frustration that early readers took these lines to say that "Poetry in Britain was some time or other really to expire"; the simple meaning, the poet complained, is that the warblings were "lost to [the Bard's] ear from the immense distance."[2] But Gray would doubtless accept that the verse of those poets who can travel across vast stretches of time is carried along by a rare power. A decline in force and hence in volume evidently occurs late in the career of John Milton. Nothing written in between "blooming Eden" and Gray's own anxious moment can quite reach the anticipatory ear of his Bard. The English poetry I scrutinize in this study covers the same period. It suggests that Gray was right, only not in the way he meant to be. Spanning from *Paradise Regain'd* ahead to Whig verse of the earlier eighteenth century, this range of understudied poems brings out a new aspect of Gray's equation of "long futurity" with "immense distance." The Whig poets I'll study were

[1] Thomas Gray, "The Bard," in *The Poems of Thomas Gray, William Collins, and Oliver Goldsmith*, ed. Roger Lonsdale (London: Longman, 1969), 177-200, at lines 131-34.
[2] Quoted by Lonsdale, notes to *Poems of Gray, Collins, and Goldsmith*, 199, note 134.

indeed pushing deep into a future state, but they were by no means lost. Time's boundlessness promised space for new literary explorations. These writers seem remote to us today largely because they succeeded so well in claiming futurity for themselves. English poetry's future responded to them by annexing their vision into its own. For the Whig writers to forge ahead in time, however, they had to escape the orbit of the material earth.

My study will center on Whig poets who set themselves against the materialism that gained traction in Restoration England, especially among the libertines. Elizabeth Singer Rowe, Edward Young, and Mark Akenside criticize such materialism as by turns nihilistic, debauched, masculinist, lazy, and static: a worldview that traps culture in the present's self-satisfied body. In response, they attempt a countervailing poetry of the spirit. They speculate that the human soul or mind in escaping the body leaps into an angelic condition, a higher state of being that supplies changed powers of perception and awareness. On their account, the soul not only distinguishes the human from the brute, but also carries the promise that the human can become divine. The individual soul's future harbors the altogether new. But in a modification of the discourse of enthusiasm, with its promise of direct access to God, the Whig poets also contend that the separated soul's enhanced powers and changed life can be drawn to the present. I'll maintain throughout this study that their visions address the tensions of a specific cultural moment in England and were sparked by resulting disputes about the soul's future. I will consider these debates in this introductory chapter.

A couple of potential objections need to be addressed first. The Whig poets promulgate a vision that is no doubt religious, at times abrasively so, and some present-day readers may protest that these authors write in the service of a stifling orthodoxy. But I'll aim

to show that they react so strongly against materialism, a philosophy they lump together with other cultural threats, that they also drive past the mandates of orthodox Christian theology. If their experiment begins in what might reductively be called a conservative backlash, it leads to a spiritual vision both unsettled and unsettling. These poets depend on potentially destabilizing energies to attack their opponents as mired in sameness. I will often juxtapose their writings with contemporary philosophical and theological texts. So another possible concern is whether their anti-materialist project is properly literary. I'll insist that it is, and not just because it's undertaken in verse. Most often my contextualizing aim is to bring out points of contact between intellectual controversies and the popular imagination, showing that the latter consistently engaged the former. But even if one wishes to go as far as Donald Greene did, substituting *Augustinian* for *Augustan* when defining this period,[3] one can hardly expect that writers deferred all theological questions to expert authorities. Religiously motivated writing of the age is messier and more assertive than that. Nor were the Whig poets especially concerned to draw out the implications of their metaphysical visions. Their poems are never as philosophically explicit as, for example, Alexander Pope's moral essays or his *Essay on Man*. Besides, it's not clear that such explicitness always matters: the latter poem of Pope's could be both deemed too worldly by Edward Young (other critics were harsher) and recovered for mainstream Anglicanism by William Warburton.[4] The Whigs I'll discuss are committed to sounding an obviously partial call for cultural change, one premised

[3] See Donald Greene, *The Age of Exuberance: Backgrounds to Eighteenth-Century English Literature* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970), 92-100.

[4] See Daniel W. Odell, "Young's *Night Thoughts* as an Answer to Pope's *Essay on Man*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 12 (1972): 481-501; James McLaverty, "Warburton's False Comma: Reason and Virtue in Pope's *Essay on Man*," *Modern Philology* 99 (2002): 379-92; and Adam Rounce, "'A Clamour Too Loud to Be Distinct': William Warburton's Literary Squabbles," *Age of Johnson* 16 (2005): 199-217.

on the belief that poetic visions of a better life can make life better. Their project is also distinctively literary in its engagement with Milton, whom they were by no means alone in refitting as a founding Whig.[5] It is Milton's blank verse that these three poets take up and rework. It is Milton's angels that the separable souls in their poems emulate and whose powers they summon. And it is Milton's materialism that these authors either miss or gloss over and then redefine.

Chapter One therefore reaches back to the Restoration Milton. I consider continuities between *Paradise Regain'd* and Socinianism, an anti-trinitarian movement that promulgated a rational approach to scriptural reasoning and that the anti-trinitarian Milton described as being within the ambit of Bible-based Protestantism.[6] Another commitment Milton shares with many Socinian thinkers is his mortalism, the notion (to put it in general terms) that the human soul has no future apart from the body. According to this heterodox school of thought, Christian hope should find its object in resurrected bodies, not released souls. An emphasis on corporeality is one way in which Milton's futural orientation lines up with his materialist outlook. But the Whig poets, self-styled heirs of Milton, elaborate a competing vision of futurity that seeks to undercut materialism and consequently redirects the legacy of Miltonic poetry. My subsequent chapters treat these writers one by one, detailing their distinct yet related strategies for characterizing the individual soul's detached existence and clutching at its resources for the present.

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[5] See Nicholas von Maltzahn, "The Whig Milton, 1667-1700," in *Milton and Republicanism*, ed. David Armitage, Armand Himy, and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995), 229-53.
[6] See Sarah Mortimer, *Reason and Religion in the English Revolution: The Challenge of Socinianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010); and John Milton, *Of True Religion, Hæresie, Schism, Toleration*, in *The Complete Prose Works*, ed. Don M. Wolfe, et al., 8 vols. (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1953-82), 8:416-40, at 424-26.

In this introduction I focus on the interval more or less between Milton's death in 1674 and the early eighteenth century. I assess the heated theological climate and describe some circumstances of materialism of the time, a necessary intellectual context for the Whig poets' desired intervention. The first section begins with a fuller discussion of the mortalist critique of orthodoxy and proceeds, by way of Socinian thought, to materialism more broadly understood. I end this section by discussing the shrewd orthodox attempt to condemn materialism as a species of libertinism. In the next section, I describe neo-orthodox responses that vilify any such materialism, narrowing the possibilities for change allowable to material bodies as such. These reactions also expand the possibilities available to the immaterial soul, which is increasingly seen as acting in the body (and then beyond the body) as God acts in the universe. The second section highlights two interrelated developments that made way for the futural vision of Rowe, Young, and Akenside: first, the increasing availability of the idea that the separated life of the soul represents an improvement rather than a temporary dislocation or diminution; and second, the shift from a claim that the soul's separate state enforces social regulation to a claim that this state secures new individual freedom and potential. The final section of the introduction summarizes these changes and offers an overview of the chapters to follow.

BODILY FUTURES: MORTALISM, SOCINIANISM, AND MATERIALISM

A fissure runs through Christian orthodoxy's account of what happens to the human soul when the body dies. In a recent study of Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*, Robert Pasnau outlines this tension with unusual clarity. On the one hand, as Pasnau shows, Aquinas insists that immaterial souls or minds don't stop existing after bodily death. Always

active, they move without delay into what theologians call the intermediate state, the phase that intervenes between normal embodied life and God's final raising of all bodies. In this phase, souls receive provisional rewards or else punishments, a foretaste of their ultimate destiny following the Resurrection and the Last Judgment. Though death doesn't interrupt awareness, Aquinas argues that thought must work differently once the thinking soul is disembodied: "a soul separated from its body will take up the mode of cognition that the angels employ."[7] "In the next life," Pasnau explains, "the soul will be attuned to the world of pure thought," will "function much as other spiritual substances function" (375). The separated soul will live as the angels do and will commune with them. On the other hand, however, Aquinas asserts that disembodied existence is a downgrade for human beings. Pasnau puts it this way: "Aquinas explains that although the angelic mode of cognition is *in principle* better than turning toward phantasms [i.e., sensible objects of perception], it is not better *for us*. We are better off with bodies because our intellects aren't powerful enough to learn very much from the angels" (377). Aquinas determines, then, that embodiment is "*natural* and *proper* to the soul, but not *essential*" (379). Experiencing separation from one's body is part of what it means to be human, but for Aquinas "the life of a separated soul would not be fully human" (388). As the Angelic Doctor himself has established, such a life is more angelic than human. Now an angel's freedom certainly sounds preferable to the plodding operations of an earthbound human mind. Yet Aquinas, speaking on this point for

[7] Robert Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature: A Philosophical Study of "Summa Theologiae" Ia 75-89* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), 371; further references to the book in this paragraph are cited parenthetically by page numbers.

later Protestant orthodoxy, settles upon the stabilizing claim that humans just aren't meant to be angels. Bodies are proper, though not strictly necessary, to human identity.

One critique of this position elaborated by some Protestant thinkers is a Christian version of mortalism. For the mortalists, the idea of a separable soul leads the orthodox into needless and frankly unbiblical complications. These critics hold that embodiment is necessary, not just natural, to human life. They claim that the soul dies with the body or else that it sleeps while the body is dead.[8] Either way, body and soul cannot be separated: it takes a body to describe a soul. The only afterlife that awaits the redeemed is therefore the one that begins with bodily resurrection. Instead of conveying a neutral description, the term *mortalism* initially carried an accusation: the position sought to kill off the immortal soul. From a scandalized orthodox perspective, the demise of the soul spells the death of other spiritual substances and finally the death of God. The differences in perspective are noteworthy. Whereas orthodox theology presents the fully conscious souls of the dead awaiting the Apocalypse in a spirit realm, the mortalist view depicts the bodies and souls of the dead lying unconscious in the ground. Adherents thought (indeed a few Protestant theologians still think) that the latter perspective reflected above all a sensible reading of the Bible.[9] Bodies are all that humans have now and all that Scripture promises them for the future.

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[8] Nicholas McDowell, "Dead Souls and Modern Minds?: Mortalism and the Early Modern Imagination, from Marlowe to Milton," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 40 (2010): 559-92, at 559.

[9] Bryan W. Ball argues that Christian mortalism in England issues preeminently from Reformation-era biblical theology, with its intermixture of "philosophical deliberation and theological argument." *The Soul Sleepers: Christian Mortalism from Wycliffe to Priestley* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2008), 13. For a present-day argument resembling the old mortalist critique, see N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008).

The mortalist critique has other temporal ramifications, as the case of Thomas Hobbes can illustrate. In *Leviathan* (1651), mortalism enforces a boundary between two commonwealths: the civil state under the Christian sovereign and the eternal kingdom of God, "where God himself is Soveraign."[10] A temporal break between these two realms is necessary because, as Hobbes sees it, no geographical one obtains. Both kingdoms have their place on the earth. Hobbes's royalism understandably gets most of the readerly attention: the divine must not infringe upon the temporal, and the church militant must submit to kingly rule.[11] But in *Leviathan* Hobbes also discusses at length God's coming reign, using biblical proofs to argue that the "Kingdom of God is to be on Earth" because the soul's immortality is "is a doctrine not apparent in Scripture" (*L*, 38:311, 310). God will wield direct civil authority, his throne being in heaven but his "Footstoole," with his embodied subjects, on the earth (*L*, 38:318). According to Hobbes, the Resurrection, the true beginning of "Immortall Life" (*L*, 38:311), names this transition and supplies these subjects. By spurning the idea of an intermediate state, he rejects an alternative or parallel society of souls. The human kingdom cedes its place to the divine, only time dividing the two. Indeed, on his account the next life—one can already imagine Hobbes's critics recognizing—appears merely to perpetuate the present life.[12]

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[10] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), 38: 311; hereafter abbreviated "*L*" and cited parenthetically by chapter and page numbers in the text.

[11] Hobbes argues that no religious demands should trump the magistrate's decrees. Otherwise "men [will] see double, and mistake their *Lawfull Soveraign*," a confusion that will issue in "Faction, and Civil war in the Common-wealth, between the *Church* and *State*; between *Spiritualists*, and *Temporalists*" (*L*, 39:322). David Johnston explains how mortalism allows Hobbes to keep God's power to punish on the other side of the Resurrection; before then, the magistrate's authority is paramount. See "Hobbes's Mortalism," *History of Political Thought* 10 (1989): 647-63.

[12] As J.G.A. Pocock explains, Hobbes's "'world to come' so closely replicates this world that the distinction tends to disappear"; eternity seems "an infinite prolongation of the time we know." "Time,

Despite Hobbes's reputation at the time (and among today's academics) as an atheist who couldn't say so openly,[13] the overlooked second half of *Leviathan* contributes to the seventeenth century's counter-tradition of Christian mortalism. Hobbes's political leanings were not at all representative of the wider cause, however. As J.G.A. Pocock notes, mortalism surprisingly links the royalist Hobbes with the millenarianism of the radical sects and with Gerrard Winstanley in particular. Pocock avers that "what is going on is a conjunction of some kind between Hobbes's philosophical materialism and the apocalyptic and millennialist speculation reaching a high-water mark in England about the time that *Leviathan* was published, a conjunction occurring at a point where salvation could be presented as a temporal, a historical and even a millennial process."[14] The author who defended regicide in *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* likewise defended mortalism. Milton came to adopt a version of the position that Adam adumbrates in *Paradise Lost*: "All of me then shall die."[15] The point is elaborated in Milton's theological treatise, *De Doctrina Christiana*, which contends that "the whole man dies" and that no intermediate state, with provisional rewards or punishments for the soul, exists: "there is no rewarding of good or evil after death until [the] day of judgment."[16] Because the treatise was locked away upon

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History and Eschatology in the Thought of Thomas Hobbes," in *The Diversity of History: Essays in Honour of Sir Herbert Butterfield*, ed. J.H. Elliott and H.G. Koenigsberger (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1970), 149-98, at 174 and 175.

[13] For a revisionist study tracing commonalities between Hobbes and Calvinism, see A.P. Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992).

[14] Pocock, "Time, History and Eschatology," 175-76.

[15] John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 1998), X.792.

[16] John Milton, *Christian Doctrine*, in *The Complete Prose Works*, ed. Don M. Wolfe, et al., 8 vols. (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1953-82), 6:400, 414. In the late 1970s, a revival of interest in mortalism among Milton scholars helped to clarify the doctrine's significance for his writings. See especially William Kerrigan, "The Heretical Milton: From Mortalism to Assumption," *English Literary Renaissance* 5 (1975): 125-66; Norman T. Burns, *Christian Mortalism from Tyndale to Milton* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press,

Milton's death and only rediscovered in 1823,[17] this pronounced feature of his materialist imagination was not at all widely recognized by eighteenth-century readers. Nevertheless, the "conjunction of some kind" between Hobbes's materialist ideas and other claims for an earthbound heaven was no doubt visible to later commentators. The orthodox conceived of themselves as buffeted by both.

Following the Revolution of 1688-89 and across the turn of the eighteenth century, it was under the auspices of Socinianism that the mortalist critique most clearly remained in play. Mortalism has in fact been persuasively treated as a case study of the Socinian effort to synthesize philosophy and theology.[18] In rejecting the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation (and with them the orthodox understanding of the divinity of Christ), Socinians conjoin rationalism with unblinking scripturalism, "the common Protestant belief in the supremacy of Scripture as the rule of faith."[19] In a historical survey of English Socinianism, Justin Champion claims that "the leviathan of the movement was John Biddle," who "died in 1662 after a disease contracted while imprisoned by the Restoration authorities," but whose "Interregnum works were republished in the 1690s in the double-columned Unitarian tracts financed by Thomas Firmin." And affiliated with the philanthropist Firmin and his publishing project were worthies such as John Locke and John Tillotson, future Archbishop

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1972); and Christopher Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* (1977; reprint, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), esp. 317-23.

[17] See Barbara Lewalski, *The Life of John Milton: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 416. A new translation and edition of *De Doctrina Christiana*, prepared by John K. Hale and J. Donald Cullington for the Oxford *Complete Works*, has not yet reached print at the time of this writing.

[18] Nicholas Jolley, "The Relation between Theology and Philosophy," in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), 1:363-92, esp. 382-85. My thinking in this section is indebted to Jolley's helpful snapshot.

[19] Jolley, "Relation between Theology and Philosophy," 383.

of Canterbury.[20] But no sooner had "Socinianism [. . .] extended its influence to the highest levels," in Champion's phrase, than other writers quite publicly accosted the Church of England for giving too much leeway to anti-trinitarians. A similar internal dispute fractured Dissent at the Salters' Hall Debate in early 1719, a controversy that seriously damaged the dissenters' attempts to win political toleration.[21] As Champion notes, the tensions were such that legislation was passed in 1698 (then reinforced in 1714) that made it a civil offense, punishable by up to three years' imprisonment, for so much as discussing the trinitarian controversy.[22]

Given all the commotion over the Trinity as the century turned, literary scholars might be forgiven for having neglected disputes concerning Socinianism that pertained to the nature of spirit. Though the Socinians are best remembered as anti-trinitarians who denied the orthodox case for Christ's divinity, Nicholas Jolley remarks that "among philosophers they were perhaps equally notorious for their commitment to the mortalist heresy."[23] John Locke is a crucial figure in such discussions. Locke was often charged with holding Socinian views. Early assessments of his work took place in the framework of that accusation, and charged debates continue down to the present day about the precise nature

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[20] J.A.I. Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken: The Church of England and its Enemies, 1660-1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), 106-107.

[21] See David L. Wykes, "Religious Dissent, the Church, and the Repeal of the Occasional Conformity and Schism Acts, 1714-19," in *Religion, Politics and Dissent: Essays in Honour of James E. Bradley*, ed. Robert D. Cornwall and William Gibson (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), 165-83; and Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660-1780*, vol. 1, *Whichcote to Wesley* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991), 170.

[22] Champion, *Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken*, 107.

[23] Jolley, "Relation between Theology and Philosophy," 383.

of his relation to Socinianism.[24] However one wishes to answer the latter question, it's nearly impossible to deny that Locke held sympathy for the Socinians in general and for their conception of mortalism in particular.[25] Still, if we take Locke as a representative case of the persistence of Socinianism in and through the 1690s, we might underestimate the challenges faced by others who held Socinian opinions, and we might downplay the venom those opinions occasioned. We might also fail to recognize that some of the bile that had been directed at deniers of Christ's divinity was increasingly being spewed at deniers of the soul's immortality and immateriality.

Sensitive to High Church fears that the Revolution of 1688-89 would lead to a repetition of the events of the 1640s, writers with Socinian leanings tried to win favor for their radical vision by insisting that, besides being true, it wasn't really radical. To this claim the precedent of John Biddle presented something of a hindrance. The republication of Biddle's works stoked the fears that his heirs were trying to calm. Even "Biddle's closest followers," as Nigel Smith emphasizes, "sought to make his theology and his reputation more respectable." Here was a writer, after all, whose *Twofold Catechism* (1654) had dismayed a parliamentary committee by "ascrib[ing] to God a body that existed in a specific place and which had a specific shape," all the way down to left and right hands.[26] Despite later attempts to restrain these arguments, the author of the *Twofold Catechism* and the probable

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[24] To get a sense of the disagreement, compare the respective contributions by John Marshall and Victor Nuovo to *English Philosophy in the Age of Locke*, ed. M.A. Stewart (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000).
[25] See for example Jolley, "Relation between Theology and Philosophy," 383; and Galen Strawson, *Locke on Personal Identity: Consciousness and Concernment* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2011), xiv-xv, 99-104.
[26] Nigel Smith, "'And if God was one of us': Paul Best, John Biddle, and Anti-Trinitarian Heresy in Seventeenth-Century England," in *Heresy, Literature, and Politics in Early Modern English Culture*, ed. David Loewenstein and John Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006), 160-84, at 175, 169. See also Lewalski, *Life of Milton*, 328.

translator of the *Racovian Catechisme* (1652), a Socinian manifesto, provided an easy target for High Church critics. Writing at the beginning of the eighteenth century, the non-juring Irish bishop and indefatigable controversialist Charles Leslie, for example, lashes out at Biddle while objecting that his descendants want to be at once ancient and modern.[27] Leslie first depicts the Socinians as an exotic group peculiar to a

> small Corner of the World, our miserably distracted and divided *Island*, which in the time of our *Late Schism* of 41 produc'd, like *Egypt*, upon the Over-flowing of the *Nile*, monstrous Herds of *Heterogeneous Heresies*; among whom were these now reviv'd *Semi-Arian*, *Semi-Socinian, English Unitarians*, the *Foundation* and *Rise* of *Quakers*, *Muggletonians,* and *vile Puddle* of our *Sectaries*; among whom *John Bidle* not the least then arose, a *School-Master* in *Glocester*, now own'd by our *English Unitarians*, his *Life* written with great Pomp, and his *Blasphemous Works* re-printed, and put amongst the Volumes of the *Unitarian Tracts*, now freedly *Publish'd* and openly *Dispers'd*, to poison the Nation[.]

In responding to this allegation, Leslie says, the Socinians claim a pedigree both wide and deep: "ancient *Hereticks* are inlisted to shew the *Antiquity* and *Universality* of the English *Unitarian* Creed."[28] Leslie wants to show that the Socinians will lose either way. If their ideas

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[27] On Leslie's ecclesiology and politics see Robert D. Cornwall, *Visible and Apostolic: The Constitution of the Church in High Church Anglican and Non-Juror Thought* (Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press, 1993).

[28] Charles Leslie, *The Socinian Controversy Discuss'd: Wherein the chief of the Socinian Tracts (publish'd of late years here) are consider'd* (London: G. Strahan, 1708), part VI, xxxvi-xxxvii. Leslie holds that the Socinians privileged independent judgment strategically, only to skirt allegations of heresy by group association. W.J. Mander explains the Socinian emphasis on private judgment in terms of interpretive method: "For them the Bible was authoritative but was only properly understood through individual rational analysis rather than through institutional tradition." *The Philosophy of John Norris* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008), 100.

are ancient, they only perpetuate tired and long-discredited heresies; if modern, they promise nothing more than the pitiful innovations of defeated enthusiasts, their system reducible to the fevers of a raving logic teacher from Gloucester. Leslie concludes that the Socinians' emphasis on rational analysis betrays their theology as a mere human contrivance on par with Islam, for him yet another vile upstart inspired by the arch-heretic Arius.[29]

Among the Socinian thinkers who sought to soften Biddle's rough edges and who replied to Leslie's attacks was another Irishman, the dissenting minister Thomas Emlyn.[30] One of Emlyn's pamphlets rebukes Leslie for his scornful language but refrains from defending Biddle directly. Instead Emlyn stresses the reasonability of his own arguments, all predicated on the calm stability of the law of non-contradiction. A contradiction imputed to God—whom the orthodox attest is one as well as three—is for Emlyn a contradiction still. He insists that everyday people with necessarily limited knowledge of God can recognize and reject such fallacies. The author offers two other interrelated examples. "I may doubt," he writes, "whether God be a pure Spirit, or be only a gross Body; whether my Soul be material or immaterial: but leaving this still in doubt, I am sure 'tis not both *material and immaterial*."[31] Admitting the prospect of a material deity, Emlyn subtly evokes Biddle and surpasses Locke, who had recently incited a fierce debate by conjecturing that "GOD can, if he pleases,

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[29] "Generally speaking," Leslie declaims, "where-ever *Arianism* Prevail'd, and no where else among *Christians*, was *Mahometism* Embrac'd; which was but an Improvement upon the stock that the *Arians* had laid down." *Socinian Controversy Discuss'd*, part VI, xxix. Noting that Francis Cheynell called Biddle's translation of the *Racovian Catechisme* "that 'Racovian Alcoran,'" Champion situates Leslie within an "Anglican counter-polemic" that "was not only strengthened by the identification of Socinian theology with Islamic, but also by their complicity as human impostures." *Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken*, 106, 112.

[30] On Emlyn in a philosophical context, see David Berman, *Berkeley and Irish Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2005), 84-85.

[31] [Thomas Emlyn], *A Vindication of the Remarks upon Mr. Cha. Leslie's First Dialogue on the Socinian Controversy* (London, 1708), 1, 5.

superadd to matter a faculty of thinking."[32] Locke's hypothesis presumes that matter is inert and incapable of cognition unless a spiritual God retrofits it otherwise. Emlyn, by contrast, allows for the possibility that matter has always been able to think on its own—that even God could be a body. Phrased with such care, as an option available to logical analysis, the Socinian materialism that Biddle had elaborated in the Interregnum was able to persist into the new century.

Emlyn was hardly alone in his theological inclinations or rhetorical strategy. In a detailed examination of debates about the soul, Ann Thomson confirms that the renewal of Socinianism kept alive the mortalist understanding of futurity in turn-of-the-century England. She explores the work of little-known mortalist writers from this period who depicted themselves as advancing the Protestant cause and who, in agitating for further reformation, adopted the Socinians' "insistence on reason in matters of religion and skepticism towards unnecessary doctrines."[33] Among Thomson's case studies are Henry Layton and William Coward. Layton, a Yorkshire gentleman, was compelled to react to Richard Bentley's second Boyle Lecture, published as *Matter and Motion Cannot Think* (1692). Exasperated that orthodox arguments such as Bentley's "involve their authors in perplexities and incoherence [. . .] which probably undermine Christian belief," Layton argued on biblical grounds for a fiery material soul that lives and dies with the body. Coward, a sometime poet who settled into a medical practice in Ipswich, tried to unify mortalism with new

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[32] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 4.3.6. The influential fourth edition of the *Essay*, Nidditch's copytext, appeared in 1700. On the debate incited by Locke's only tangential suggestion, see John W. Yolton, *Thinking Matter: Materialism in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1983).

[33] Ann Thomson, *Bodies of Thought: Science, Religion, and the Soul in the Early Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008), 41.

developments in physiology. He claimed that thinking takes place through the motion of spirits in the brain. Coward renounced "the need for an immaterial soul continuing after the body's death, partly because [this notion] seemed both to run counter to Scripture and to be incapable of demonstration." All of the texts recovered by Thomson express concern about vestiges of Catholicism that had become mainstays in English Protestantism, "including," she notes, "the downplaying of Judgement Day."[34] Such criticisms square with the opinions of Milton's *De Doctrina Christiana*; indeed, the mortalist critique had only grown timelier since Milton's death.

These and other mortalist writers made a splash but, as Thomson points up, never made it into the mainstream: their efforts "led to violent reactions which managed to circumscribe [their] ideas to a minority or to discourage publication of them."[35] The mortalist critique may have grown more urgent, but attempts to elaborate it were met with increasing force, the orthodox critics (Anglicans as well as dissenters) becoming emboldened by the presence of these revived dangers. I'll consider some specific features of the orthodox response in the next section. Suffice it to say here that the cautiousness of a Thomas Emlyn had a hard time withstanding the spleen of a Charles Leslie. In another tract responding to Leslie, for instance, Emlyn addresses the complaint that Socinians, in line with other mortalists, deny the existence of an eternal hell. Emlyn retorts that the beliefs Leslie attributes to Socinians are also shared by many trinitarians. Then, yielding ground, Emlyn

[34] Thomson, *Bodies of Thought*, 102, 110, 44.
[35] Thomson, *Bodies of Thought*, 23.

points out that not all Socinians necessarily "deny *Hell-Torments*."[36] In this pamphlet (as in later revisions to the *Racovian Catechism*), the desire for conciliation appears to trump any strong commitment to what had been a staple of Socinian theology. So despite earnest attempts to bring mortalism—as part of a biblically sound materialism—into harmony with prevailing Protestant norms in the early eighteenth century, mortalist arguments became more, not less, toxic in English intellectual discourse. Even Socinians might feel the need to distance themselves from the doctrine. As a result of mostly successful counterattacks, the axiom grew more pervasive that attempts to rethink the uninterrupted life of the immaterial soul endangered belief in an eternal God. But such a correspondence between soul and God could in turn, as I'll suggest below, become something more than that.

The cultural toxicity of even a scripturally sensitive mortalism brings us back to Hobbes. What to some thinkers was a good-faith effort to recover an uncorrupted understanding of the Bible was to many others just one more debased attempt to destroy the life of the spirit. And there was, in all fairness, an array of claims about the soul's nonexistence being circulated in post-Restoration England. Hobbes the exponent of Christian mortalism could easily enough be taken for Hobbes the atheist and patron saint of

[36] [Thomas Emlyn], *An Examination of Mr. Leslie's Last Dialogue, Relating to the Satisfaction of Jesus Christ. Together with some Remarks on Dr. Stillingfleet's True Reasons of Christ's Sufferings* (London, 1708). Emlyn's point is that both Socinians and trinitarians alike can admire *Sermons on Hell-Torments* by the former Archbishop of Canterbury John Tillotson. According to Emlyn, Leslie attributes arguments actually made by the churchman to Socinian heretics. But because Tillotson (who died in 1694) had his own associations with Socinian figures, Emlyn's use of this example as reflective of trinitarian orthodoxy isn't at all straightforward.

the libertines.[37] Among the latter set, Thomas Creech's translation of *De Rerum Natura* (1682) was much praised and emulated. In Creech's rendering of Lucretius, as Laura Linker explains, "the soul appears as a [. . .] mortal part of the body," and "the soul's mortality counters Plato's argument for the transmigration of souls."[38] Though Linker doesn't say so (perhaps the point is obvious), the Lucretian vision of the soul's demise also counters the orthodox argument for the soul's future state. I'll build the case in Chapters Two, Three, and Four that the Whig poets who spurned materialism did so in large part by referring to the libertines' self-consciously erotic and irreligious version of that philosophy. To present-day scholars, the attempt to turn the legacy of Miltonic poetry against materialism reflects a strong—if not to say perverse—misreading. Yet the story of Milton's appropriation by the Whigs has to take into account the staying power of memories of Charles II's lascivious court, epitomized by that reviled materialist the Earl of Rochester. I'll be suggesting that images of the libertines strengthened the Whig writers' belief that mortalism was a stain on any possible materialism. These Whigs held that the libertines deny the soul's future and aggrandize embodiment for the sake of their own power and ruthless pleasure.

I'll also propose that this argument, censorious though it is, shouldn't be lightly dismissed. The casting of materialists as libertines became a powerful polemical tool. Not that Rochester couldn't see the assault coming, even though he died in 1680. In a poem deeply indebted to both Hobbes and Lucretius, he ridicules the human soul or mind as the

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[37] It's well established that Hobbes had a shaping influence on English libertines of all stripes. For a recent discussion, see Roger D. Lund, *Ridicule, Religion and the Politics of Wit in Augustan England* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012).

[38] Laura Linker, *Dangerous Women, Libertine Epicures, and the Rise of Sensibility, 1670-1730* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), 4. Linker mentions in particular to Aphra Behn's laudatory poem about the translation, "To Mr. Creech (Under the Name of Daphnis) On His Excellent Translation of Lucretius" (1683).

orthodox sometimes described it and as they increasingly stressed it in subsequent decades: "This supernatural Gift, that makes a mite | Think hee's the Image of the Infinite."[39] To him, the idea of a God-installed mind and the pretensions it enables amount to sheer quackery: "Born on [such reason's] wings each heavy Sott can pierce | The limits of the boundless Universe" (84-85). The soul is a foolish contrivance, the poet replies, and bodies are what we have to work with: "Our sphere of Action is Lifes happiness, | And he who thinks beyond, thinks like an Asse" (96-97). *A Satyre against Reason and Mankind* was written in 1674, the year Milton died,[40] and when Rochester's poem mocks notions of infinity and boundlessness, it comes remarkably close to the idiom that would be used in all earnestness by Whig poets who wanted to elaborate a Miltonic language of the soul's futurity. These later authors depicted their project as a necessary measure to ward off a multifaceted cultural disease: a religious fight to stabilize orthodox belief, a political program to protect the nation from the Stuarts, a social-reform movement to save manners from debauchery, and a literary campaign to rescue the distinctiveness of English verse from the incursions of foreign models. Recoiling against critiques of the doctrine of the soul's immortality, and reconceiving materialism as libertinism, the verse of the Whig poets scripts their opponents as mired in the bodily present.

[39] John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, *A Satyre against Reason and Mankind*, in *Works*, ed. Harold Love (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), pages 57-63, at lines 76-77; hereafter cited parenthetically by line numbers.
[40] See Love, notes to *Works of Rochester*, 383.

CLAIMS FOR THE SOUL'S DETACHMENT: REGULATION AND NEW FREEDOM

I began the previous section by observing that Aquinas and Hobbes both accept that human beings are meant finally for bodies. Although Aquinas theorizes the parallel universe of the intermediate state, a holding chamber for separated souls between death and resurrection, he also argues that the condition of separation is provisional and in its way inhuman. Such a future state requires that souls live the way angelic creatures do. But Aquinas rejects the enticing implication that temporarily separated human souls are on par with the angels. The angels will still be higher beings than we are, Aquinas insists, and later Christian theology was inclined to agree. In this section I'll propose that the counteroffensive against mortalism, part of a larger orthodox reaction to materialism across the turn of the eighteenth century, allowed even Aquinas's qualified insistence on the human body to be muted. Accordingly deemphasized was the Last Judgment. Along the way, some writers who saw themselves as supporting the orthodox cause were drawn once more to the notion that detached souls will be other than human. The resulting vision of futurity was the one Aquinas had disbarred: the souls of the obedient, moving beyond earthly bodies, gain the freedom and power of heavenly angels. Such a portrait of ascent represented an alternative to the dominant argument that English theologians of the day tended to make for the intermediate state, the argument that it supported social stability by guaranteeing imminent rewards and punishments.

As Ann Thomson points out, the putative dangers of materialism led most orthodox writers near the end of the seventeenth century to embrace the Cartesian understanding of

the soul.[41] Descartes's response to the new science had been to safeguard the existence of God and the human soul by positing a wholesale separation between mind and matter, saving thought from mechanism.[42] Despite some early misgivings, the argument that matter is necessarily passive, impenetrable, and unthinking "became the standard recourse of theologians, as it founded the need for a creator and an immaterial thinking substance."[43] This doctrinal hardening drew criticism from such mortalist writers as William Coward, introduced above. Illustrating once again how orthodoxy and heterodoxy reciprocally define and reinforce each other,[44] Coward's critics felt justified in their fears about rising irreligion and responded with vehemence. The attacks did not come from low-level operatives. One was brought, as Thomson shows, in *Psychologia* (1703), a work written by John Broughton, chaplain to the Duke of Marlborough. The Lower House of Convocation sought to condemn Coward's writings as part of a campaign against heretical books. And Coward came in for abuse from Daniel Defoe, who in fact attacks the mortalist's work alongside Jonathan Swift's *Tale of the Tub* (1704), blaming both (in Thomson's phrase) for "indulging in flights of extravagant imagination, talking of things they do not understand."[45] In many such disputes, the orthodox rehearsed a litany of increasingly common assertions: "that matter was passive and incapable of thought, that the soul's immortality was a scriptural doctrine,

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[41] Thomson, *Bodies of Thought*, 44-61.

[42] "Thus we can easily have two clear and distinct notions or ideas," Descartes writes in the *Principles of Philosophy*, "one of created thinking substance, and the other of corporeal substance, provided we are careful to distinguish all the attributes of thought from the attributes of [material] extension." *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984-85), 1. 211.

[43] Thomson, *Bodies of Thought*, 49, 63.

[44] See J.G.A. Pocock, "Within the Margins: The Definitions of Orthodoxy," in *The Margins of Orthodoxy: Heterodox Writing and Cultural Response, 1660-1750*, ed. Roger D. Lund (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995), 33-53, esp. 49-52.

[45] Thomson, *Bodies of Thought*, 125, 132. Defoe's jabs appear in *The Consolidator*.

that punishments and rewards after death were necessary, and that to deny the soul's immortality entailed dangerous consequences for society."[46] Arguments for the future state of the soul relied heavily on the last two of these claims.

Recall that most Protestants expected the intermediate state to involve consequences that were meted out immediately after a person dies: heavenly rewards for the redeemed, hellish punishments for wrongdoers. God's verdicts on resurrected bodies at the Last Judgment therefore only ratify what separated souls had already experienced. (On this telling the Last Judgment is, as mortalists often lamented, altogether anticlimactic.) Writers with orthodox leanings, Anglicans and dissenters alike, consistently made the case that the doctrine of the intermediate state secures social stability. On the terms of this argument, the immediacy with which an individual soul will meet consequences for its actions in life has a regulatory function. The argument seems to assume an absolute or objective clock by which people instinctively measure the distance between current actions and future retributions. When Christian mortalists argued that the dead don't experience any time lag between death and resurrection, the orthodox replied by insisting that, if mortalism were true, the living would still realize that a lag would occur. The absolute clock would show a long time passing between their actions today and their retributions at the Last Judgment. Thus the threat of punishment or the hope of reward would be dulled and have a diminished influence on human conduct. One way to summarize the alarm underlying all of this is to say that without acute expectations of imminent pleasure for obedience or pain for disobedience, people will behave like libertines. Perhaps another darker aspect of the doctrine's attractiveness was that

[46] Thomson, *Bodies of Thought*, 122.

it seemed self-enforcing: the intermediate state of souls guarantees imminent punishment for those, for example, who deny the existence of an intermediate state.

If the expected proximity of retribution is the crucial factor in determining human actions, the intermediate state performs vital regulatory work by bringing God's rewards and punishments closer to the here and now. This is an unsavory (if strangely Humean) way to talk about ethical action, but the argument won a broad following among theological writers in the early years of the eighteenth century. An essay written by the famous dissenting minister and author Isaac Watts offers a paradigmatic example. Watts maintains that mortalism's idea of punishment, deferred until God's final judgment, "set far beyond Death and the Grave at some vast and unknown Distance of Time, would have but too little Influence on [living people's] Hearts and Lives."[47] The general contention is that the expectation of a long "Distance of Time"—here the objective clock comes in—blunts the impact of promised retribution for one's actions. In a more specific claim that's tough to credit, Watts suggests that if mortalism became acceptable, bad people would mistakenly believe that a charitable God will take that long "Distance of Time" and change his mind about the punishments they are due. Such groundless thoughts of divine mutability, Watts worries, could lead to ethical slackness. His pamphlet later adds a supporting point with which Samuel Johnson surely would have agreed. Watts writes that the reality of disembodied souls explains the appearance of ghosts: "the Multitude of Narratives which we have heard in all Ages of the *Apparition of the Spirits or Ghosts* of Persons departed from this

[47] [Isaac Watts], *An Essay Toward the Proof of a Separate State of Souls between Death and the Resurrection, and The Commencement of the Rewards of Virtue and Vice immediately after Death* (London: R. Hett, 1732), 10.

Life, can hardly be all Delusion and Falshood."[48] Here it is the annals of popular experience that confirm the Protestant belief in an intermediate state. Watts surmises that mortalism must be false because some ghost stories, at least, must be true. Like the theological rationale for their existence, lingering ghosts bring the fear of punishment intensely near and summon the living toward moral uprightness.[49] Ghosts do their part, that is, to regulate behavior.

In this preoccupation with swift retributions, orthodox apologetical works give voice to lingering worries about the English Civil War, with which mortalist opinions were quite rightly identified. I've mentioned the anxiety, exemplified by Charles Leslie, that the 1690s would bring a repetition of the 1640s. Yet the strenuous refusal to reenact the past could take different forms. As this section has thus far claimed, the polemical strategy favored by many orthodox writers entailed supporting the intermediate state of souls on the grounds of social control: the living must believe that God will punish disobedient souls with all haste, not just at the end of time. The application of this argument to the sectarians is rather straightforward, the case seeming to be inspired by a need to bury mortalism in the revolutionary past. On the other hand, particularly from a Whig political perspective, fears about the past also had to account for the lively threat of a return to Jacobean rule—a repetition of the 1670s, perhaps. From this point of view, reflection on the soul's futurity had perhaps less to do with guaranteeing retribution and more to do with pursuing modern freedom. A reenactment of the past might mean a return to divine-right monarchs, Catholic

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[48] [Watts], *An Essay Toward the Proof of a Separate State of Souls*, 57.

[49] George Starr has recently argued against the attribution of *The Apparition of Mrs. Veal* to Defoe in large part because Defoe believed (Starr claims) that souls move immediately to heaven or hell and no longer interact with the living. See "Why Defoe Probably Did Not Write *The Apparition of Mrs. Veal*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 15 (2003): 421-50. The belief that souls wholly detach themselves from the affairs of the world was not one that Defoe's Whig contemporaries Rowe and Young shared.

priestcraft, and lecherous courtiers. Whatever the guiding motivation, a number of writers seized upon the idea of proximity, which was so pivotal to the psychological argument about retribution, and sketched out a different line of defense. They imagined that the future state of the soul brought close to hand the new experiences of an angelic life.

My chapters on Rowe, Young, and Akenside will reveal how this alternative manifested itself in poetry of the earlier eighteenth century, but a few examples from the era's prose should clarify the basic terms of the outlook. Although Watts would not have committed himself to the thesis that detached souls become angelic beings, his writings may have encouraged speculation about the new powers available to the disembodied. In his *Philosophical Essays*, for instance, he proposes that human creatures in a wholly spiritual state operate with a different kind of locomotion: "An imbodyed Soul (that is, a Soul acting in Concert with an animal Body) when it becomes a separate Soul (that is, a Soul acting in its own pure intellectual Capacity without a Body) does not need properly to alter its Place, but only its manner of thinking and acting, in order to be in Heaven and Hell, i.e. happy in the Presence of God, or miserable in the midst of Devils, acting and thinking without Bodies."[50] All such a soul has to do to move into a new place is to think itself there. Unconsciously and no doubt problematically, Watts echoes a lament from *Paradise Lost*: "Which way I fly is hell; myself am hell."[51] This won't be the last time we will see a Whig writer evoke the figure of Milton's Satan when portraying the released and newly empowered human soul. John Norris, like Watts a cleric and poet who moved in Rowe's literary circles, adapts from the Cambridge Platonists the argument that the soul's immortality reflects its intrinsic dignity. He allies the

[50] I[saac] W[atts], *Philosophical Essays on Various Subjects* (London: R. Ford and R. Hett, 1733), 174-5.
[51] John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 1998), IV.75.

mortalist position, which he says "represent[s] the Soul as a Corruptible Being," with "the Philosophy of Atheism or Libertinism." Urging in reply that the human soul is by its very nature (rather than by God's special action) immortal, Norris makes a case for its "real Excellence and Perfection."[52] He invites the conclusion that the soul's release from a decaying material body represents a rise into such perfection. Now I won't depict Plato as a steady influence on Whig writers, with the partial exception of Akenside, in the chapters to come. Even allowing for that case, it would be too simplistic to call them Neoplatonic in any straightforward sense.[53] Plato's precedent, however, remains significant to the extent that writers could rely on a vague sense that flight from the earthly body leads the soul closer to fundamental realities. In the specifically English religious context I've been describing, a young Elizabeth Singer could daydream about the proximity of an angelic existence: "I am cloy'd with all the impertinences that attend human life, and long to know what novelties the invisible regions have to entertain me with. I can find no gust in anything but the thoughts of being plung'd in immortal pleasures, and being regal'd with infinite beautitudes."[54] Here the doctrine of the soul's future apart from the body serves as a pledge that the obedient human will soon become an angel, finding a true home in the "invisible regions."

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[52] John Norris, *A Philosophical Discourse concerning the Natural Immortality of the Soul* (London: S. Manship, 1708), 75, 13.

[53] As I'll mention in my chapter on Edward Young, J.G.A. Pocock has discussed the complicated, and largely antagonistic, relationship between eighteenth-century English thought and classical philosophy. See "Clergy and Commerce: The Conservative Enlightenment in England," in *L'età dei Lumi: Studi storici sul Settecento europeo in onore di Franco Venturi*, 2 vols. (Naples: Jovene, 1985), 1:524-62, esp. 553-54.

[54] *The Miscellaneous Works in Prose and Verse of Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe*, 2 vols. (London: R. Hett and R. Dodsley, 1739), 2:25.

Some more or less orthodox writers claimed that the soul's detachability also promises a new vantage on matter, whose power they felt the need to restrict.[55] The Anglo-Irish churchman George Berkeley illustrates this approach and provides one last example worth considering. Though there are notable differences between the Whig poets' project and Berkeley's, both spring out of the same rejection of materialist thought and mortalism in particular. In fact, David Berman, Berkeley's best interpreter, has persuasively argued that the philosopher's earliest notes on temporality were provoked by the writings of William Coward, the poet-physician who sought to popularize an updated Socinian mortalism and who drew counterattacks from Defoe and others.[56] Coward denies the intermediate state of souls and calls for a properly biblical hope in resurrected bodies, and Berkeley tries to support the orthodox cause by going the other way, denying that matter can exist without immaterial minds.[57] Without mind-independent matter, though, we need a new way to think about time. Berkeley opts to argue that all time is psychological time. Time is nothing more than the mental experience of the succession of ideas.[58] Because ideas are the units of time's flow, time is subjective and experiential. Diverging dramatically from the strand of apologetics that presumes an absolute or objective clock, Berkeley determines that

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[55] This notion evokes the procedure that Michael McKeon uses to define modern knowledge: "Disembedded from the matrix of experience it seeks to explain, modern knowledge is defined precisely by its explanatory ambition to separate itself from its object of knowledge sufficiently to fulfill the epistemological demand that what is known must be divided from the process by which it is known." *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2009), xix. A variation that I'll be following is the (patently self-interested) anti-materialist argument that one has to get outside of matter to see it aright.

[56] Berkeley also spurns Socinianism together with materialism in *A Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710) § 95; see George Berkeley, *Philosophical Works, Including the Works on Vision*, ed. Michael R. Ayers (London: Everyman, 1996), 126-27.

[57] David Berman, *George Berkeley: Idealism and the Man* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 66.

[58] See also John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), II.xiv.4-6.

everyone's time is different, non-coincident. The philosopher can therefore conjecture that (as Berman explains, quoting Berkeley) "there would seem to be no time after what is 'vulgarly called Death' and before the Resurrection, if no ideas intervene. Hence an allegedly dead person has not really stopped existing *qua* mind. This would happen only if there were public or absolute time in which the stopping could take place." The possibility that Berman finds in Berkeley's early writing is that a soul will experience the Last Judgment just after experiencing death, no ideas (hence no time) having passed in between.[59]

What Berman doesn't notice is that this reaction brings Berkeley into line with the very position he means to knock down. If time is gauged by the flow of the soul's ideas, and the soul has no ideas between bodily death and bodily resurrection, then the soul is basically indistinguishable from the body during that interval. Berkeley has become, in these early notes, a mortalist quite by mistake. In later works, he explores different ways to contend for the viability of the intermediate state of souls.[60] He joins the cluster of anti-materialist writers who proposed that the soul gains new capacities in a disembodied future: "Now, it seems very easy to conceive the soul to exist in a separate state (*i.e.* divested from those limits and laws of motion and perception with which she is embarrassed here), and to exercise herself on new ideas, without the intervention of these things we call bodies. It is even very possible to apprehend how the soul may have ideas of colour without an eye, or of sounds without an

[59] Berman, *George Berkeley*, 63, 67.

[60] Recognizing this inconsistency, scholars have begun to ask how Berkeley thought the soul's ideas might operate in the intermediate state. If ideas do still "intervene" for the disembodied soul, perhaps they flow in a new way. So claims Roomet Jakapi, "Berkeley and the Separate State of the Soul: A Note," *Berkeley Studies* 18 (2007): 24-28. See also Darren Hynes, "Berkeley's Corpuscular Theory of Time," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 22 (2005): 339-56; and Marc A. Hight, "Berkeley and Bodily Resurrection," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 45 (2007): 443-58.

ear."[61] Having first stumbled into agreeing with the mortalists that the soul won't experience time while the body is dead, Berkeley later self-corrects and luxuriates in the prospect that the soul will gain new modes of thinking and perceiving when in a separate state. His related "embarrass[ment]" with the limits of the body takes him far away not only from the mortalists, but also from the view of Aquinas, who came to the opposite conclusion: it is the separated soul that will be embarrassed, for it lacks a human body to think and act through.

Berkeley's example reinforces the case that it became increasingly tenable to think about the soul's movement into the intermediate state as a progression into new freedom. I've described this possibility as an alternative to the grim proposition that the intermediate state is required to impose order on human beings who need to expect imminent retribution to behave well. But once the dream of ascent gains appeal, the writers who share in it have a hard time accounting for the bodies demanded by the doctrine of the Resurrection. The difficulty is understandable. If indeed we become angels just after we die, why should we ever want to return to those embarrassing earthly bodies? Berkeley also epitomizes another way that the hostile reaction to materialism prompted bold overcorrections. Berman describes how early in his career the philosopher attempts to redefine eternity as unending succession. Berkeley then argues for the immortality of the soul by claiming that the sequence of its ideas is also unending. The definition of eternity becomes the definition of the soul, and the latter ends up being the measure of the former. Berkeley's attempt to sort out a new understanding of the soul's immortality therefore "seems to lead to the conclusion that the soul is an eternal being which cannot be created or destroyed." Responding to

[61] Letter to S. Johnson, 25 November 1729, in *Philosophical Works*, ed. Ayers, 422-26, at 425.

thinkers who claim the soul dies, the early Berkeley finds himself wondering if the soul has always lived—an opinion that "in turn tends towards transmigration of the soul, an even more unacceptable doctrine for a Christian philosopher."[62] The effort to exalt the soul unexpectedly smuggles in the baggage of the cosmic past and intensifies the difficulty of distinguishing that soul from the God who (Christians are supposed to think) created it. As we will see, similar problems recur among Whig poets who likewise attack materialism and represent themselves as advancing the cause of the embattled immortal soul.

PATTERNS OF ASCENT

It might be useful to visualize the competing accounts of the soul's future that I've been surveying. In different ways, all three of them convey arguments about ascent. First, in the background, there is Thomas Aquinas's view, which into the early modern period could stand for a broadly orthodox consensus. According to Aquinas, the core of human identity is the soul, but embodiment is the soul's proper state. Death temporarily breaks up the body-soul composite, and the soul in its resulting state of separation is diminished, inhuman in a negative sense. The Resurrection brings body and soul back together, and the reestablished composite being has, by comparison to the previous version, enhanced powers:

[62] Berman, *George Berkeley*, 69.

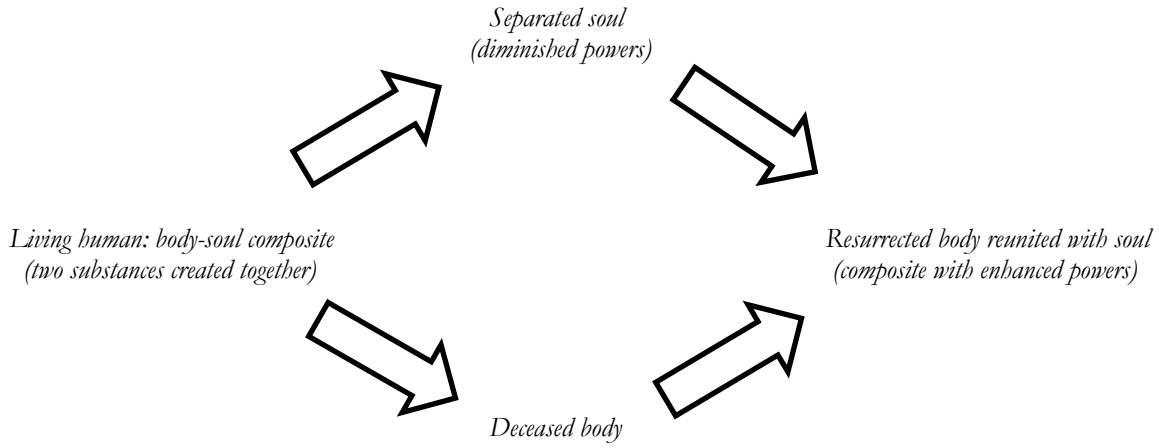

Figure 1: Orthodox view of the soul's future relative to the body

Next I considered the mortalist critique of the orthodox viewpoint. Because the mortalists reject the idea of a parallel life for the soul apart from the body, this second argument takes a simpler shape. Everything takes place on the plane of the body:

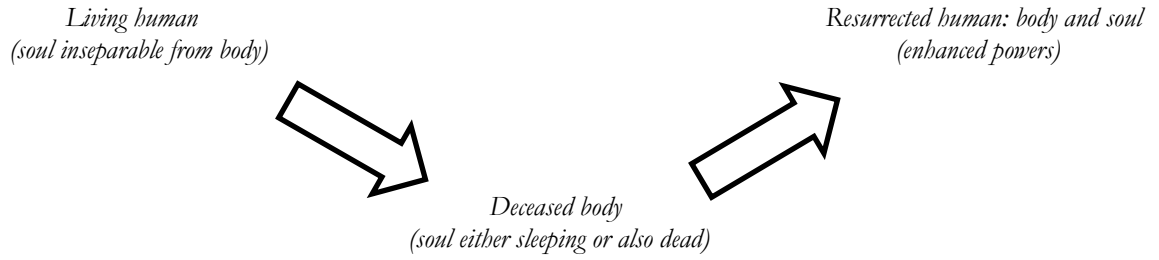

Figure 2: Mortalist view

Finally, in the second half of the previous section, I introduced an alternative vision that emerged from the critique of materialism. As my example from Berkeley's early writing attests, and as the Whig poets to varying degrees will confirm, this third view slips into conceding the preexistence of the soul, the life of the soul before the current body. And by characterizing the flight from corporeality as an acquisition of (or perhaps a return to)

angelic power, this third position makes the resurrection of the body a problem rather than a stable conclusion:

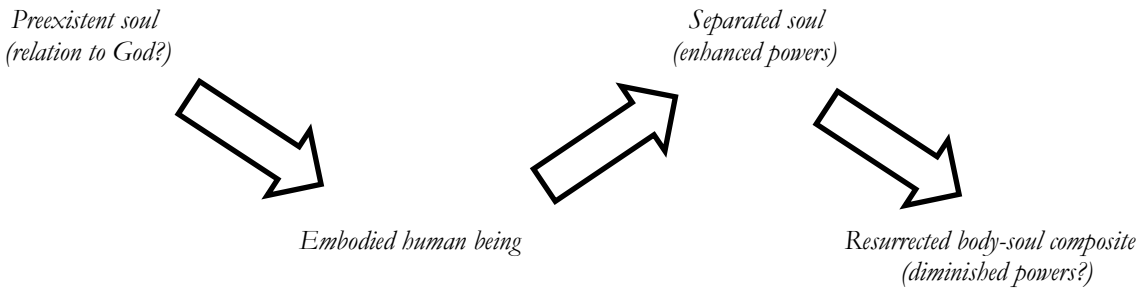

Figure 3: Developing anti-materialist view

From the perspective of Figure 3, what Figure 2 renders as high points are in fact low points, limitations on the freedom of the soul. Thus the final three moments of Figure 3, which ends with bodily resurrection, invert the three moments depicted in Figure 2. Figure 1 should reflect the tension I identified in Aquinas's position: the soul when apart from the body lives as the angels do, immersed in the world of pure thought. Yet because Aquinas maintains that humans need bodies to realize their full potential, separation brings a provisional diminishment of power. Figure 3 suggests, by contrast, that detached human souls do ascend to angelic power. One consequence for this vision is that bodily resurrection brings a descent down the scale of being, a slide back to the meanness of material life. This destiny resembles nothing so much as punishment for the liberated soul, a return to the chains that Rowe, for example, often associates with the earthly body. Without looking beyond the bounds of the orthodox Protestant reaction to materialism, we have thus come

to an early eighteenth-century perspective quite close to William Blake's later notion that "the fall of man and the creation of the physical world were the same event."[63]

Like their contemporary Berkeley, the Whig poets I study below want to hold that the soul or mind of each person defines the movement of time. Rowe, Young, and Akenside concur with Norris that mortalism is just a version of libertinism: a wishful fantasy, redolent of the Stuart court, for which bodies are all that exist. These Whigs take the materialist emphasis on the body and the earth to spell purgatorial (or at least Hobbesian) repetition. Alongside the prose writers I mentioned toward the end of the previous section, these poets avow that the soul has a future apart from the body. More specifically, they embrace Berkeley's belief that the soul in breaking free from the body stretches into newness, achieving angelic powers of perception, cognition, and movement. That the soul can separate from the body means for them, in short, that the future can break from the present. And yet these poets are impatient for change. They refuse to wait in hope for newness to come. Thus they declare that the inspired soul can draw against its angelic future, can access imminent angelic power, in the present. While Socinian writers of the time labored tirelessly to keep themselves from being tarnished by the imputation of dangerous enthusiasm, the Whig poets took up and reshaped enthusiastic discourse in the service of an anti-materialist vision.[64] Now enthusiasm's promise is typically construed as a blurring of the boundary

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[63] Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969), 41.
[64] On the recuperation of enthusiasm, see Shaun Irlam, *Elations: The Poetics of Enthusiasm in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1999). For the counterargument that even a rehabilitated enthusiasm still had to be contained and policed, see Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2003). Mee and other critics have faulted Irlam's account for being too sanguine and schematic.

between self and God.[65] But the Whig poets, as I'll argue, trouble a different boundary: the one dividing the soul's present embodiment from its coming freedom. They take the soul's disembodied life, which orthodox apologetical works consistently portray as close to hand, and pull it closer still. Rather than become lost in God (an outcome that these writers in fact dread), they imagine inspired souls lost in the fullness of their own future power.

Re-envisioned in this way, the life of separated souls portends a teeming freedom. The telling irony is that this doctrine, so often defended as necessary for social regulation, also came to be approved on grounds that reopened fresh opportunities for rupture and disorder: it ensured the nearness of new spiritual potential that might in turn be plundered for the here and now. We might well call Rowe, Young, and Akenside time pirates.[66] Their drive into newness, which at times leads them well outside the confines of the dualist orthodoxy they set out to reaffirm, thus evokes the "lawlessness" mentioned in the epigraph to this dissertation. Kenneth Patchen's poem about paradisal dreams likewise refers to "anonymity." The enthusiastic and eminently detachable souls in the poetry of Rowe, Young, and Akenside become new selves with altered perceptions of the world. They remain, however, individual agents, refusing to be either drops in the bucket of divinity or participants in a fixed, equitable economy. The Whig poets find that vast expanses of futurity

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[65] See for example Misty G. Anderson, *Imagining Methodism in Eighteenth-Century Britain: Enthusiasm, Belief, and the Borders of the Self* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2012).

[66] In making this case below, I am indebted to the work of Margaret Anne Doody and Suvir Kaul. For Doody, Augustan verse is appetitive and expansive, its style that of "buccaneering millionaires, intelligent, ingenious and insatiable." *The Daring Muse: Augustan Poetry Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985), 17. For Kaul, who quotes Doody, "the energy of the 'buccaneering millionaires' is often qualified by a poetics of nationalist fear." *Poems of Nation, Anthems of Empire: English Verse in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 2000), 23, 35. I wish to extend these analyses but also adjust them as I reassess eighteenth-century poetry whose energies spur not so much geographical as temporal expansion.

offer them a boundless marketplace of possibility. They want to invest some of the future's reserves into cultural change, but they also claim the freedom to push past the strictures of politeness and decorum—to fly their own way. Both of these words from Patchen's poem hint at what I mean by *exponential* in the title of this study. Each Whig poet I'll examine brings out a distinct pattern or motif by which future freedom can be grasped in the present. For Elizabeth Singer Rowe the relevant figure is acceleration. For Young the salient figure is expansion. For Akenside it's differentiation, the rhythm through which modes of life perpetually diversify. For all three, the process by which the soul gains new power presages yet more power to come. From here the end looks endless. Yet their acquisitive hope, a paradisal dream of always having something different to clutch and to be, brings in its train profound anxieties about returning to what has already been.

In the next chapter I look back to *Paradise Regain'd*, a work that later chapters treat as a crucial false start (an oft-refused start) for eighteenth-century Whig poetry. Chapter One reassesses Milton's brief epic alongside two touchstones of English Socinianism: John Biddle's *Confession of Faith Touching the Holy Trinity* (1648) and the English translation of the *Racovian Catechism* (1652), probably also by Biddle's hand. I argue that the Restoration Milton shares Biddle's futural disposition, subordinating metaphysical speculation to materialist patience. Subsequent chapters concentrate on the Whig poets and their respective figures of futurity. Chapter Two contends that Rowe hurries along the process of separation from decaying bodily forms, the poet fashioning her poetic souls as heirs to Milton's angels. In Chapter Three, I argue that Young's *Night Thoughts* synthesizes the tenor of devotion with the language of mercantilist imperialism. The result is a universe that always satisfies the

soul's hunger for more novelty. Akenside depicts all created life as tending toward higher reaches of spirit, and I claim in Chapter Four that he portrays the poet-figure as a distinctively inspired soul, one whose perceptual powers can change what it means to be human. The Whig poets envisage paradise as a blissfully long futurity that keeps on expanding the range of human activity and multiplying new beings and new kinds of being. My coda briefly considers the future that awaited their vision in English literary history.

Chapter One: Socinian Time and the God-Man's Forms in *Paradise Regain'd*

The hero of *Paradise Regain'd* (1671) is a Son who seems to be a god-man, and the trouble with god-men is deciding how that hyphen works. Criticism of Milton's late poem often takes its bearings from the *De Doctrina Christiana*, the theological treatise in which Milton, who insists on the unity of a single true God, nevertheless accepts the biblical evidence for the duality of the Son of God. Milton discerns in Christ a merger of divine and human natures: "of two natures or, in other words, of two essences, of two substances and consequently of two persons." The *De Doctrina* concedes that "we do not know how it is so."[1] God keeps secret the operation but not the truth of the christological hyphen. It is this deduction from the biblical text that enables Milton's treatise to validate the mystery of the Incarnation as sound while rejecting that of the Trinity, which the poet sees as an unbiblical interpolation.[2] The scripturally mysterious Christ of the *De Doctrina*, whose subordinate divinity converges with his humanity, therefore cannot escape the specter of self-division. The Father is numerically one, but Christ, the god-man, is unaccountably but irrefutably two. Unlike many contemporaries, Milton refuses to elide Christ's "working humanity." As one scholar sums up the trend in orthodox thinking prior to the eighteenth century, the Son of

[1] John Milton, *Christian Doctrine*, in *The Complete Prose Works*, ed. Don M. Wolfe, et al., 8 vols. (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1953-82), 6:424. References to the *Prose Works* are hereafter abbreviated *YP* and cited parenthetically by volume and page numbers. On slippage in the *De Doctrina* among the discrete terms *hypostasis*, *essentia*, and *subsistentia*, see Maurice Kelley's discussion at *YP*, 6:224, note 56.

[2] Milton puts the contrast succinctly: "There is [. . .] not a single word in the Bible about the mystery of the Trinity, whereas the incarnation is frequently spoken of as a mystery" (*YP*, 6:420).

God's "human life was seen as effectively swallowed up by the consciousness of divinity."[3] A divinized Christ thereby achieved psychological coherence: his humanity, though retained as theoretically necessary, was overridden in practice. The mysteries of self-division were meanwhile displaced onto the triune godhead. Christ was truly God, and the Trinity drew the hyphen into itself.[4]

Recent criticism tends to attribute the two-in-one unity of the *De Doctrina*'s Christ to the hero of *Paradise Regain'd*. But no less than Christian theologians, interpreters of Milton's brief epic have found the precise balancing of God and man difficult to sustain. Several different methods have been tried. John Rumrich relies on the language of hybridity, claiming that the poem's hero, "Son of God and Mary," has both a "hybrid psyche" and a "hybrid body."[5] Here Milton meets the challenge of the hyphen—unifying the conjoined terms *God* and *man*—by tapping into the power of paradox. Barbara Lewalski turns to theologies of kenotic self-emptying and proposes an evolving Son instead, a short-term human who recovers his subordinate divinity through flashes of "special divine illumination." An Arian Christ metamorphoses into the contingent man whose task is then to become a god-man.[6] G.A. Wilkes by contrast perceives continuity in Milton's hero. He

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[3] Adrian Hastings, "Incarnation," in *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, ed. Hastings, Alistair Mason, and Hugh Pyper, with Ingrid Lawrie and Cecily Bennett (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000), 321-24, at 322.

[4] Theologian John Milbank has sketched a history of this idea of the Trinity as harmonious self-division, as difference before dialectic: "Building on the neo-Platonic recognition of the One as itself 'without limits', beyond the sphere of division and contrast which involves dialectical negation, both Augustine and Dionysius (in their trinitarian theologies) went further by situating the infinite emanation of difference within the Godhead itself." *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 428.

[5] John Rumrich, "Milton's *Theanthropos*: The Body of Christ in *Paradise Regained*," *Milton Studies* 42 (2003): 50-67, at 65, 59.

[6] Barbara Lewalski, *Milton's Brief Epic: The Genre, Meaning, and Art of "Paradise Regained"* (London: Methuen, 1966), 159. David M. Whitford has called Lewalski's theological premise into question, controversially

claims that while "the Christ of *Paradise Regain'd* experiences the entire action in his human nature alone," the poem, viewed from a different vantage, also affords "a coherent presentation of Christ in his divine nature."[7] If so, the relationship between the Son's humanity and his divinity maps neatly onto the relationship between his own perspective and the reader's: while the hero perceives himself as a man, the interpreter recognizes him as a god. Against all such harmonious readings, Abraham Stoll locates division within Christ: in "the unstable identity of the incarnate Son" he sees a "fractured subjectivity" that contributes to the poem's bland indifference. It is this last noun that he uses to register Milton's ultimate position on the ontology of the Son.[8] For Stoll the hyphenated Christ of the *De Doctrina* reappears in *Paradise Regain'd*, but the poet still cannot resolve the god-man. So the late Milton comes to deemphasize, this last critic concludes, the tie between the Son's two natures.

Despite his claim for the dwindling of the hyphen, Stoll renders *Paradise Regain'd* itself a failed hyphen. On his interpretation Milton's poem textualizes the impossibility of bringing together any two terms without also reaffirming their separateness. A fractured god-man offers a ready synecdoche for a problem that Stoll thinks is ultimately structural: he reads the brief epic to replicate the Book of Job's "disjunction between the human and the divine." The poem's action begins at the divine level, descends to the human, and returns at last to the divine.[9] The dramatization of the god-man pulses, that is, from God to man and

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maintaining that "kenotic theology did not exist until the nineteenth century." "Mistaking the Tree for the Forest: Why Kenotic Theory in Milton is Anachronistic," *Milton Quarterly* 41 (2007): 149-64, at 149.
[7] G.A. Wilkes, "The Dual Reading of *Paradise Regained*," *Sydney Studies in English* 18 (1992): 72-84, at 72, 84.
[8] Abraham Stoll, *Milton and Monotheism* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne Univ. Press, 2009), 247-48, 255.
[9] Stoll, *Milton and Monotheism*, 232-33.

hastily back again. The two can't coincide. Stoll finds that the poet swerves away from his treatment of the human Son with haste but without power, yielding a disjointed work and a divided hero.[10] Christ's two natures cannot intelligibly cohere, so this reading asserts, and neither can the poem. The hyphen between *God* and *man* appears doomed to signify "or." It cannot seem to hold as "and." Reversing Samuel Johnson's famous lament that *Samson Agonistes* lacks for a middle, Stoll sighs that the rich middle section of the brief epic meets only an anticlimactic ending. He rightly views the middle of *Paradise Regain'd* as Milton's experiment with Socinian assertions for the manhood of Christ. But as I hope to reveal, this claim for Milton's engagement with Socinianism should be extended, despite Stoll's belief that the text can't see its experiment through.

Stoll's conclusion illustrates one limit case of the strategy of importing the *De Doctrina*'s Christ into the frame of the later poetic work. If the unity of God and man in the treatise's depiction of Christ is taken to frustrate readerly understanding, then we might well expect the poem to yield up a god-man whose coherence, being unthinkable, proves exasperating.[11] The other limit case operates with much the same logic but different presuppositions. If the possibility of an incomprehensible unity that transcends the gulf between Christ's two essences is taken to offer solace, then we might well expect the poem

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[10] Stoll, *Milton and Monotheism*, 248.

[11] Some scholars go further by arguing that differences between poetic and theological thinking lend vibrancy, but never closure, to Milton's work. In *Paradise Lost* N.K. Sugimura, for example, sees the materials of the *De Doctrina Christiana* newly released in a frenetic whirlwind: "as the verse opens itself up to literary analysis," she proclaims, "the theological and philosophical tensions intertwined with the poetry break free, unleashing dynamic forces that at once complicate and also enrich Milton's thought and its figurative representation in poetry." *"Matter of Glorious Trial": Spiritual and Material Substance in "Paradise Lost"* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2009), xvi. Such an association of poetry with freedom, whatever its merits, might satisfy a metacritical need for release from the expectation of Milton's mastery. Not even Milton, scholars might insist, can orchestrate the full coincidence of poetry, philosophy, and theology, which in their Miltonic collisions (or collusions) emit brilliant sparks nevertheless.

to supply the satisfactions of paradox: it performs the oneness it can't rationally demonstrate. Readers at one limit, nicely typified by Stoll, derive the purported failures of *Paradise Regain'd* from the logical restrictions acknowledged in Milton's theological treatise. Readers at the other limit celebrate the brief epic as successfully portraying the mystery that Milton ratifies as biblical in the treatise. For readers at both limits, however, the Son as theorized in the *De Doctrina Christiana* reappears in *Paradise Regain'd*, which becomes either way, in this christological sense, a gloss upon Milton's theological prose.[12] Both Stoll and the critics he opposes, in presuming that one rendering of the god-man descends directly from the other, picture a Restoration Milton whose poetry is indexed to previous works and remains oriented to the past.

Reading Milton otherwise, I wish to set out instead from the *De Doctrina*'s own assertive ambiguity about the god-man, as encapsulated in Milton's admission that "we do not know how it is so" (*YP*, 6:424). But questioning a tidy equivalence between the Christ of the treatise and the Son of the brief epic does not require the assumption that the latter diverges from the former because of destabilizing energies that inhere in all poetic language.[13] Stoll decides that the brief epic is plagued, and in the end defeated, by the kind of indecision about the god-man's union that Milton underlines in the *De Doctrina*. This chapter will hypothesize rather that the poem strives to rethink that inconclusively examined union. Milton, I will propose, marshals the resources of Socinianism to interrogate afresh the

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[12] This relation reverses the influential language of Maurice Kelley's *This Great Argument: A Study of Milton's "De Doctrina Christiana" as a Gloss upon "Paradise Lost"* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1941).
[13] For different examples of this assumption in action, see Peter Herman, *Destabilizing Milton: "Paradise Lost" and the Poetics of Incertitude* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Michael Bryson, *The Tyranny of Heaven: Milton's Rejection of God as King* (Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press, 2004); and Sugimura, *"Matter of Glorious Trial."*

relation between God and man in Christ. His earlier uncertainty about the Son ("we do not know how it is so") might after all energize rather than stultify or predetermine the poet's labor of depicting his hero in *Paradise Regain'd*. If poetry can, at the very least, reexamine what it doubts it can know,[14] then the brief epic reveals a willingness to reactivate the unresolved question of christological union.

In the word *god-man* as in Milton's late work, the question of the hyphen can be phrased as a problem of time. In our language the conjunction, with or without the hyphen, takes linear shape as a sequence, and reading the combination sequentially entails registering first *god* and then *man*, one before the other. Practiced readers will no doubt seem to see the entire compound at once, but with fine enough recording instruments we could still capture the temporal span (mere nanoseconds) necessary to process it. Words so perceived cannot be combined, I am suggesting, in the same way that chemical elements can. Holding *god* and *man* together requires the ineluctably time-bound work of anticipation and retrospection, the first term being elongated, as it were, to grip the second. Thus temporality at best conditions and at worst (if we slow down the tape enough) imperils the unification of the conjunction's two terms. Stoll's chapter on *Paradise Regain'd* comparably organizes the brief epic into the sequence *God-man-God*: the one, then the other, then again the one; but never, for Stoll, both words at once. Through agglomeration the hyphen tries to manipulate the temporal

[14] I have in mind Jonathan Kertzer's view of reason in verse: "When arguments grow ambiguous, contradictory, indeterminate, recursive, or circular, they do not cease to be logical, or propose an alternative form of logic. Instead, they indicate the complications that logic permits us to think, as they encourage and bewilder thought." *Poetic Argument: Studies in Modern Poetry* (Kingston, Ontario: McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 1989), 43; quoted in J.H. Prynne, "Poetic Thought," *Textual Practice* 24 (2010): 595-606, at 606.

movement which it presupposes and on which it depends. But such an observation indicates that time can serve as a necessary resource, not just a controlling context or a threat.

Temporality in this last sense allows Milton to engage Socinian ideas in *Paradise Regain'd* as he casts a reconceived god-man as hero. Three pertinent features of Socinian theological thought, as exemplified by the English controversialist John Biddle (1615/16-1662), call for preliminary attention for now.[15] (I will elaborate on all three and on Biddle's work below.) First, Biddle like most Socinians holds that Christ's divinity was bestowed upon him in time and therefore that this derived divinity does not inhere in the nature of the Son of God. Second, Biddle presents a Christ who orients himself to the future. This Son is a representative of the new creation, the world he instaurates in the Resurrection, not of the old one forged in Genesis. Third, Biddle maintains that Christ adopts the divine form of God only in temporally localized performances of miracle. According to this understanding of miracles, the union of the god-man is not a state but an event, the circumscribed achievement—like the reading of a word—of a moment. Biddle's three positions disclose the range of Milton's experiment with Socinian ideas in *Paradise Regain'd*.

The experiment required a measure of distance from the *De Doctrina*. There Milton insists that logical analysis cannot demystify the christological union, and he writes off Socinian thought. But neither appraisal should be taken as the author's last word. As I will propose first, Milton's Ramist logic holds resources for keeping alive what would otherwise be the dead (because insoluble) problem of the hyphen. Further, Milton's upbeat assessment

[15] As John Marshall notes, Biddle espoused largely Socinian views, but prudentially claiming that he reached his conclusions on his own, he "refused the label." "Locke, Socinianism, 'Socinianism', and Unitarianism," in *English Philosophy in the Age of Locke*, ed. M.A. Stewart (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 111-82, at 170.

of Socinianism in *Of True Religion, Hæresie, Schism, Toleration* (1673) marks a shift away from the anti-Socinian critiques levied in his theological treatise. The *De Doctrina* may share local affinities with other mid-century works that attack the Socinians, but as I will claim next, Milton's writings of the early 1670s reveal more sympathy for Biddle's school. These two lines—tracing possible reassessments of Christology and Socinianism—come together in my chapter's extended final section, which tracks continuities between *Paradise Regain'd* and Biddle's theology, with its audacious reframing of the notion that God and man coincide in Christ. Reconsidering the late Milton's proximity to Socinian thought, I will argue that in significant respects *Paradise Regain'd* shares Biddle's conception of the hyphen and thus Biddle's orientation to the future. Such a view of the text departs from the still prevalent Johnsonian perspective that *Paradise Regain'd* closes itself up in assured quietism and shows that, as another frustrated reader puts it, "the only proper act is no act at all."[16] In truth the brief epic begins from certainty only that "we do not know how it is so." Milton's future-minded effort to rethink this uncertainty culminates, on the poem's time, in the action of Christ's standing.[17]

A Coincidence of Forms

Paradise Regain'd can itself stand, not as a monument to the impossibility of rationally explaining the god-man, but rather a renewed attempt to confront that challenge or at least to reframe it in new terms. I have proposed distinguishing the hero of the brief epic from

[16] Herman, *Destabilizing Milton*, 162. See also Samuel Johnson, "Milton," in *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*, ed. Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), I:292.
[17] Herman in *Destabilizing Milton* rejects Rumrich's term "indeterminacy," opting instead for "incertitude" to characterize the force of *Paradise Lost* (21). Yet this same critic, following Stanley Fish, sees throughout *Paradise Regain'd* only disappointing verities and a "rejection of earthly action" (162).

the Christ of the *De Doctrina*. Making this case does not, however, require bracketing the theological treatise from consideration altogether. To the contrary, the present section should illustrate that the treatise leaves open some space for reconsidering the problem of the incarnate Son's unity. This opening can in turn be explored in the light of Milton's earlier logic text, *Artis Logicae*, published (like *Paradise Regain'd*) in the early 1670s but probably composed between 1641 and 1647.[18] As supplemented by the introduction to logic, the theological treatise hints at the evocative prospect that Christ's divine and human natures can coincide. This might just mean that his two natures overlap precisely with respect to function: both his divine essence and his human soul have the capacity to reason and (for Milton the same thing) to choose. But there remains a further suggestion that Christ's two discrete natures might overlap or rather intersect in time. Biddle, as I will later discuss, uses language of this sort to characterize Jesus's performance of miracles, and the possibility of coincident forms brings Milton's brief epic closer to the temporal framework of Socinianism.

A turn to Milton's logic, a textbook late in the line of Peter Ramus, requires some justification. Walter J. Ong, at any rate, deems Ramism "about as unpropitious for poetry as any noetic theory could well be" (*YP*, 8:203).[19] More disarming is Milton's own perception that, as Rumrich writes, the christological "problem of two-in-one fusion is not subject to rational solution."[20] Condensing the *De Doctrina*'s stance, this synopsis explains why Milton

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[18] Phillip J. Donnelly, "Logic," in *Milton in Context*, ed. Stephen B. Dobranski (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010), 349-60, at 353.

[19] See also Walter J. Ong, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason* (1958; rpt., Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2004). Rejecting Ong's pessimism, Emma Annette Wilson has recently reappraised Ramist logic as a "historically appropriate means of analysing styles at work" in Milton's verse. "The Art of Reasoning Well: Ramist Logic at Work in *Paradise Lost*," *Review of English Studies*, n.s., 61 (2010): 55-71, at 61.

[20] Rumrich, "Milton's *Theanthropos*," 58.

needs mystery to admit the paradoxical but biblical oneness of the incarnate Son. I want to resist the implication, though, that the brief epic must therefore set out from a settled question when it returns to the prospect of "two-in-one fusion." Yes, the treatise owns up to the exceptionality of the god-man, whose union evades logical exposition. But my proposal, once again, is that such bafflement about the Son's two natures need not be taken as a fixed conclusion toward which Milton's thinking must always tend; instead the openness of uncertainty might well push the poet forward to consider new (albeit still biblical) possibilities later on in *Paradise Regain'd*. One place where logical concepts prompt theological speculation, a seemingly innocuous passage in the *De Doctrina*, hints at how Milton might come again to reason through the god-man's unity. He mentions in the relevant passage that Christ's human form might coincide with his divine form. The suggestion of coincidence both lurks behind *Paradise Regain'd* and links the brief epic's reconsideration of the Son to long-running theological debates about Christ's soul.

Late in the same paragraph of the *De Doctrina Christiana* in which Milton, treating the modality of the god-man's union, acknowledges that "we do not know how it is so," he tries to reveal the foolhardiness of presuming to penetrate its mystery. He singles out the illustrative problem of the incarnate Christ's form. After reviewing philosophical questions about the "external form" of the two-natured Son, the author deduces that "the divine form, if it were not previously identical with the human, must have been either destroyed or blended with the human, both of which seem absurd. Or else the human form, if it did not precisely resemble the divine, must have been either destroyed or blended with the divine. Or else Christ must have had two forms." The poet discards this last option and then

changes registers to accept the limits of revealed knowledge about Christ: "How much better for us, then, to know only that the Son of God, our Mediator, was made flesh and that he is called and is in fact both God and man" (*YP*, 6:424). Since Milton, reversing the terms as understood by Aristotle and Aquinas, takes form and not matter to constitute proper identity,[21] he must grapple with the notion that two different principles of individuation shape the one god-man. He rejects three possible conclusions: the idea that either the divine or the human form is destroyed; the idea that the two are intermixed, losing the distinctiveness that for Milton makes them forms at all; and the idea that Christ has two external forms at once.[22] Once the passage reaches a crescendo of exasperation, Milton leaves off of the task that he presents as futile, the parsing of the conjunction between God and man. He advances another name for the unanalyzable figure thus conjoined: *theanthropos*, the (admittedly hyphen-free) Greek term for *god-man*. Then he returns to a disposition of wise ignorance.

Along the way, however, Milton has adumbrated if not detailed the possibility of formal coincidence. His discussion of Christ's two forms twice adverts to possibilities of identity: "if it [the divine form] were not previously identical with the human" and, in the following sentence, "if it [the human form] did not precisely resemble the divine." Although the thought would no doubt subject him to further difficulties, Milton here allows in passing that a coincidence or identity of forms—I will use the two nouns interchangeably—could at least lead at a bit further through the logical thicket. He does not take this step in the *De*

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[21] See *YP*, 8:233-34; Rumrich, "Milton's *Theanthropos*," 55; and Donnelly, "Logic," 356. But for a helpful clarification of Aquinas's viewpoint, see Robert Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature: A Philosophical Study of "Summa Theologiae" Ia 75-89* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), 391-92.

[22] These resolutions encapsulate various established heresies to which Milton's treatise does not subscribe. See *YP*, 6:424, note 31; and Lewalski, *Milton's Brief Epic*, 152-59.

Doctrina, hastening instead back to the safe haven of "How much better for us." Nonetheless, what if the divine and the human forms of Christ, as the author glancingly proposes, could exactly overlap?

The question recalls a passage in the *Artis Logicae* that deems numerous statues identical "in their form if [all are] statues of the same man" (*YP*, 8:249). This latter image of identity appears in Milton's chapter on the adjunct, a term of invention that the text defines as "*that of which something is the subject*" (*YP*, 8:245). In the pertinent passage near the end of the chapter, Milton discusses arguments of agreement or comparison, under which he classes "modes of unity." He explains the rationale for this classification, indicating as he does so that form is one principle of unity: "By as many ways as several things are said to agree among themselves, they are also said to be one or identical: namely, either absolutely, or in a certain way. They are absolutely one and identical by cause and effect, and in a certain way one and identical in subject and adjunct. If it is by cause, then either by efficient cause or matter or form or end" (*YP*, 8:249). This branching declension of options, a syllabus for thinking oneness, affirms that formal relations might conceivably unify the god-man. True, the theological treatise wants to place the oneness of the Son just beyond logic's limits. But I am suggesting that Milton's own Ramist logic offers rather more support for analyzing the god-man than the *De Doctrina Christiana* will admit. The "agreement" of divinity and humanity in Christ might comprise a coincidence of forms.

In its implications, this sort of union through identity reaches as far as the apocalypse. In the *Artis Logicae*'s chapter on form, Milton states that "things which differ in number also differ in essence," for these things have distinctive "proper forms." Thus "the

rational soul is the form of man generically; the soul of Socrates is the proper form of Socrates" (*YP*, 8:233-34). Articulating Milton's mature Arianism, the *De Doctrina* says that the heavenly Son, though himself a created being, exists long before the human Jesus.[23] It is the subordinate divinity of the preexistent Son that somehow merges, according to the theological treatise, with the humanity of Christ incarnate. To hazard that this union occurs in an identity of forms is to postulate that the incarnate Christ's essential human form, his rational soul, exactly resembles the rational form of the preexistent Son. Instead of a cleavage between two irreconcilable essences, the identity-of-forms hypothesis would therefore see in the god-man a harmonious concurrence. Two distinct yet indistinguishable forms coincide without blending. The divine and the human precisely overlap. The possibility astonishes—it is inconceivable for a metaphysician like Aquinas—because of the compatibility it presumes between divine and human forms.[24] Yet some such compatibility is already a central current in *Paradise Lost*. God anoints the Son as the "universal king" in Book III of Milton's epic, summoning him to "reign | Both God and man, Son both of God and man."[25] His reign will only end, promises the Father, when "the world shall burn, and from her ashes spring | New heaven and earth" (*PL*, III.334-35). On that day, he assures the Son,

> thou thy regal sceptre shalt lay by,

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[23] See John P. Rumrich, "Milton's Arianism: Why It Matters," in *Milton and Heresy*, ed. Stephen B. Dobranski and Rumrich (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), 75-92; and Martin Dzelzainis, "Milton and Antitrinitarianism," in *Milton and Toleration*, ed. Sharon Achinstein and Elizabeth Sauer (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2007), 171-85.

[24] Eleonore Stump finds that for Aquinas "the second person of the Trinity is not the sort of thing that configures matter." *Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2003), 424-25.

[25] John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler, 2nd edn. (London: Longman, 1998), III.317, 315-16; hereafter abbreviated *PL* and cited parenthetically by book and line numbers.

For regal sceptre then no more shall need,

God shall be all in all. (*PL*, III.339-41)

The *De Doctrina* allows that Christ's human form might precisely resemble his divine one. The hypothesis of identity likewise assumes that human forms, rational souls, are closely comparable to angelic and superangelic forms of divine rationality.[26] If so, the identity of the god-man's forms anticipates what the Father's speech here describes as the ultimate destiny of the just: a final conformity, a renewed existence that will fully coincide with the life of God.

In fact, "anticipates" may not be a strong enough word. That Christ's human form *can* overlap with his divine one attests to the metaphysical compatibility of people and gods, a harmony that seems to sort well with what we know of Milton's materialism.[27] But if the poet's gesture toward formal coincidence were developed into a full-fledged claim, it would hold that Christ's human form *does* overlap with his divine one. The claim could thereby establish the coincidence of two forms as an event (the same term I used to describe Biddle's view of the union forged through miracles). For Milton's logic insists that a form is "*generated within a thing simultaneously with the thing itself*" (*YP*, 8:234). I will leave open the fraught question of when in particular the god-man's forms achieve unity. But whatever the answer,

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[26] Joad Raymond sums up the scholarly consensus that Milton's materialism distinguishes angelic beings from humans: "angels are substantial and material, but, unlike humans, their matter is highly spiritual and therefore they are not corporeal." Yet Raymond also considers the well-known Miltonic scale that reaches "from the incorporeal to the merely corporeal" and allows for upward movement through obedience. *Milton's Angels: The Early-Modern Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010), 286. The hypothesis I have sketched above assumes a compatibility of rational form that cuts across the (already permeable) boundary between the corporeal and the incorporeal.

[27] See especially Stephen M. Fallon, *Milton among the Philosophers: Poetry and Materialism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1991); for an attempted modification, see Sugimura, *"Matter of Glorious Trial."*

for Milton the individuating human form of the Son cannot exist until his earthly life commences, and it is that life that accomplishes in time the identity of the divine and the human. Thought of in this way, Christ's life on earth doesn't merely foreshadow the final vision of God "all in all." It ignites a union, the coincidence of divine and human, which in the end will be so diffuse as to comprehend the whole of creaturely life. I want to bring out the speculation that the coincidence of Christ's forms is something that happens.

Mentioned in the *De Doctrina*, possibly validated by the *Artis Logicae*, the small yet pregnant notion of coincident forms carries powerful implications for earthly temporality. The hypothesis highlights the tract of time when Christ walked the earth, revealing or perhaps achieving a hitherto impossible union of God and man. This expanse contrasts with the moment more often isolated in time-attentive scholarly treatments of Miltonic theology: God's creation of the heavenly Son. (Milton sees the Son's generation taking place in cosmic time, not in eternity, and this marks his perspective as Arian.) Further, through its focus on Christ's earthly life, the hypothesis mobilizes the terms of action. It elicits questions not only about how the union operates, but also about when it occurs. This premium on the moment makes the coincidence of forms conceivable as an event within human time. And yet—one final implication—the hypothesis also gathers the time of Christ's union together with the higher temporality of apocalypse. God and creature coincide in both instances, and by reference to what philosopher Charles Taylor characterizes as "higher times," these two far-removed events can be typologically enfolded.[28] No doubt a long hermeneutical tradition

[28] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 2007), 55.

also interrelates the Incarnation and the *eschaton*.[29] But it seems likely that for Milton the convergence of Christ's forms underwrites the apocalyptic end—God "all in all"—in a sense more materialistic than traditional interpreters could accept, for Milton accepts the final compatibility of divine and human stuff. In any case, the coincidence of forms looks ahead to a new world.

These implications, if drawn out, can make Milton's suggestion of coincident forms consonant with the Socinian theology of John Biddle. But the *De Doctrina* does not pursue the implications. In that treatise Milton furthermore distances himself from Socinianism, and his god-man might be thought to agree with the orthodox god-men of anti-Socinian invective. Nevertheless Milton's text concludes of Christ's union that "we do not know how it is so," and I am exploring how this openness might be seen to prompt the rethinking undertaken in *Paradise Regain'd*, which was composed later. By exploring the possibility of coincident forms, this section has identified a framework for that eventual poetic experiment. A germ of potential for refiguring Christ's unity on something like Biddle's terms is already evident in the *De Doctrina*, if only for a passing moment. In maintaining that the brief epic activates this potential, I must also examine how Milton reconsidered Socinianism as he reimagined the christological union around the time of *Paradise Regain'd*. Milton's self-revisions in effect rescue the poem's hyphenated hero from the anti-Socinians.

[29] For an overview of this tradition, see Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, vol. 2, *The Four Senses of Scripture*, trans. E.M. Macierowski (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

GOD-MEN AGAINST THE SOCINIANS

A potential objection to my argument is that the term *god-man* in a Christian context must denote ambivalence, that the hyphenated word itself harbors inconclusiveness about Christ's unity. Caught up in mystery, the conjunction admits of no productive rethinking. A bit of contextualization can dispel such a complaint, though. The hyphen does not in itself (to adopt language from Abraham Stoll) "resis[t] propositions that could explain how the God and the man relate."[30] For the term *god-man* was in fact deployed to support specific christological positions in seventeenth-century English polemic. Some of the debates were, like earlier christological controversies, focalized through the problem of the Son of God's human soul. For his part Milton approaches this issue in Aristotelian terms, explaining Christ's human soul as a rational form. A contrasting Platonism undergirds the heterodox position called Apollinarianism. Apollinarius (d. 390) denied that Christ had a soul, holding rather that the Word, the second person of the Trinity, took the place of a human soul in the incarnate Son.[31] This view does not jibe with Milton's theology, but the orthodox refutation of Apollinarianism ended up yielding a potent antidote to Arianism as well. And the antidote endured. Indeed, the old rejection of Arius (d. 336) was often repurposed in Milton's England, where controversialists relied on it to attack rising heterodox writers like Biddle.

Let me summarize the story in brief.[32] Arius had seen the limitedness of the Bible's Christ—his gaps of knowledge, his suffering, his need to pray—as evincing his inequality with the one true God. The Christ of the Scriptures is, for Arius as for Milton, a created

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[30] Stoll, *Milton and Monotheism*, 245.
[31] Maurice F. Wiles, "The Nature of the Early Debate about Christ's Human Soul," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 16 (1965): 139-51.
[32] This paragraph draws heavily on Wiles, "The Nature of the Early Debate."

being. Theologians in Athanasius's camp retorted that only the humanity of Christ suffered, and further that "in view of the mental, emotional and volitional experiences involved, [Christ's] human nature must have included the existence of a rational human soul."[33] The Son suffered, yes, but only his humanity suffered, and a truly suffering human argues a human soul. This orthodox response answered Apollinarius and insisted on Christ's soul. But it also enabled an attack on Arius, who had equated Christ's suffering with his creatureliness. Striking two heretics with one stone, the orthodox found that their case for Christ's human soul also supported a brief for his divinity. The Son's divine nature, which trinitarians saw as coequal to the Father's, could remain uncompromised if his humanity alone suffered in the flesh. The orthodox came to argue for Christ's humanity, then, with a view to saving his divinity. They needed Christ's soul, needed it to suffer, so that his place in the godhead wouldn't have to. Likewise affirming paradox as logic, some English apologists later in the same tradition settle on the term *god-man* as shorthand for the orthodox viewpoint. Such writers deploy the conjunction to repudiate the Arians along with the Socinians, the group they often characterize as Arius's latter-day offspring.

God-man for such authors, far from remaining noncommittal about Christ's mode of unity, stipulates the orthodox truth of the mode. They therefore conscript the term as a keyword against the Socinians. Take for example the published sermon *Christ, God-Man* (1657), by Cambridge-educated churchman John Howes (1613-85). Elucidating St. John's phrase "Word made flesh," Howes identifies the only viable key for this enfleshment as *assumendo*: a motion in which the second person of the Trinity brings a human nature "into a

[33] Wiles, "The Nature of the Early Debate," 146. See also Maurice Wiles, *Archetypal Heresy: Arianism through the Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996), 147-48.

personal unity with the Son of God," the result being a "God man in the Unity of Person; the Natures (that is, the Divine and the Humane) substantially different from each other, and yet each of them retaining their essential properties."[34] Here the moniker *god-man* does more than abbreviate the implacably paradoxical Chalcedonian formula "fully God and fully man." It also evokes a particular version of the link forged between the two: the god-man as such begins in the Trinity. Howes quotes Faustus Socinus directly in the sermon, enrolling him in the disreputable company of those who deny the church's trinitarian view of Christ.[35] To embrace the orthodox understanding, to spurn anti-trinitarians like Socinus, is for Howes to perceive the god-man in his only true light.

Other contemporaries shared his vision. Cambridge divine John Arrowsmith (1602-59), a member of the Westminster Assembly and sometime master of Trinity College, mobilizes the conjunction to similar effect in *ΘΕΑΝΘΡΩΠΟΣ; or God-Man* (1660). The Puritan theologian undercuts Apollinarianism and Arianism in a single stroke.[36] His book moreover expresses "wonder, that of all the old Errors, swept down into this latter Age, as into a sink of time, this of the *Socinians* and *Arians* should be held forth amongst the rest." Arrowsmith uses *Theanthropos* to signal a warning to "beware of their doctrines, shun their meetings and persons, that come to us with the denyall of the Divinity of Christ in their

[34] John Howes, *Christ, God-Man: Set out in a Sermon, Preached at Northampton on the Lecture, being Christmas-Day, 1656* (London: J. Nevill and W. Cockrain, 1657), 22-24.
[35] Howes, *Christ, God-Man*, 6.
[36] John Arrowsmith, *ΘΕΑΝΘΡΩΠΟΣ; or, God-Man: Being an Exposition upon the First Eighteen Verses of the First Chapter of the Gospel according to St John. Wherein, is most Accurately and Divinely Handled, the Divinity and Humanity of Jesus Christ . . . To the Confutation of Severall Heresies both Ancient and Modern* (London: H. Moseley and W. Wilson, 1660), 207; hereafter cited as "Arrowsmith, *Theanthropos*."

mouths."[37] This rhetorical dynamic—god-men summoned to debunk the Socinians—culminates in a work by John Tombes (1602-76), the title of which epitomizes the conflict: *Emmanuel; or, God-Man: A Treatise wherein the Doctrine of the first Nicene and Chalcedon Councels, concerning the two Natures in Christ, is asserted against the lately vented Socinian Doctrine* (1669). Granted, these are not the biggest names in anti-Socinian invective, a field dominated at mid-century by Francis Cheynell and John Owen, both Oxford men like Tombes.[38] But Howes, Arrowsmith, and Tombes all hold fast to a strong theory of two natures in Christ. All three deploy the term *god-man* to drive back Socinian attempts to question the divinity of Christ. All three trace the Socinianism of their own age to the Arianism of an earlier one.[39] And all three illustrate the partisan uses to which the word *god-man*, by no means neutrally communicating mystery, was being put in the late 1650s and the 1660s.

This trio might seem like strange company for Milton to keep. But the *De Doctrina Christiana* also ratifies *god-man* as shorthand for a preexisting Christ's incarnation, and the treatise shares historical air with the orthodox god-men dispatched as champions to combat the Socinians. Milton's manuscript, if the research project led by Gordon Campbell and Thomas Corns is to be trusted, was nearing its final textual condition around 1660,[40] though

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[37] Arrowsmith, *Theanthropos*, 37. Arrowsmith refutes Socinus's reading of the first chapter of St. John's gospel (45-46), and his exegesis is preoccupied throughout with the divinity of Christ: see esp. 211-14. The quoted phrase "shun their meetings" ominously anticipates the Clarendon Code's restrictions on private gatherings.

[38] See Sarah Mortimer, *Reason and Religion in the English Revolution: The Challenge of Socinianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010), 109-18, 207-12; H. John McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1951), 135-41; and Marshall, "Locke, Socinianism," 111, 156-61. McLachlan claims that Socinian texts were increasingly available to English readers after 1665.

[39] See for example Howes, *Christ, God-Man*, 6; Arrowsmith, *Theanthropos*, 37, 211; and John Tombes, *Emmanuel; or, God-Man* (London: F. Smith, 1669), 10.

[40] Gordon Campbell, Thomas N. Corns, John K. Hale, and Fiona J. Tweedie, *Milton and the Manuscript of "De Doctrina Christiana"* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2007), 157-58.

it seems probable that the text was subject to further revision thereafter. So despite its unabashed anti-trinitarianism, the *De Doctrina* appears to reach some christological agreement with contemporaneous anti-Socinian literature. Milton corroborates this suggestion by taking a few jabs at the Socinians in his treatise. Three paragraphs before considering the hypostatic union, for example, the author asserts that Christ "was God with God, and although he was not supreme, he was the firstborn of all creation. It follows that he must have existed before his incarnation, whatever subtleties may have been invented to provide an escape from this conclusion, by those who argue that Christ was a mere man" (*YP*, 6:419). The Socinians of course are those who insist that Christ was, as the translated *Racovian Catechisme* (1652) has it, "a true man by nature" and not more.[41] Later in the *De Doctrina*, and in similar terms, Milton censures the Socinian reinterpretation of Christ's atonement (*YP*, 6:444).

The theological treatise's local critiques contrast sharply, however, with the broader portrayal of Socinianism in *Of True Religion* (1673). In this late tract Milton considers the heretic as one who has a "Will and choice profestly against Scripture," and he strives to clear the unquestionably scripturalistic Socinians from the allegation of heresy. "The Arian and Socinian," explains the author,

> are charg'd to dispute against the Trinity: they affirm to believe the Father, the Son, and Holy Ghost, according to Scripture, and the Apostolic Creed; as

[41] *The Racovian Catechisme* (Amsterledam [*sic*], 1652), 27. See also Mortimer, *Reason and Religion*, 18. As I note below, Milton very probably licensed a Latin edition (London, 1651) of the controversial Socinian catechism, and John Biddle was likely its translator for the just-cited 1652 English edition. See Nigel Smith, "'And if God was one of us': Paul Best, John Biddle, and Anti-Trinitarian Heresy in Seventeenth-Century England," in *Heresy, Literature, and Politics in Early Modern English Culture*, ed. David Loewenstein and John Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006), 160-84, at 168; but also note Stephen B. Dobranski, "Licensing Milton's Heresy," in *Milton and Heresy*, ed. Dobranski and Rumrich, 139-58, esp. 140-44.

> for the Terms of Trinity, Triniunity, Coessentiality, Tripersonality, and the like, they reject them as Scholastic Notions, not to be found in Scripture, which by a general Protestant Maxim is plain and perspicuous abundantly to explain its own meaning in the properest words, belonging to so high a Matter and so necessary to be known; a mystery indeed in their Sophistic Subtilties, but in Scripture a plain Doctrin.

Milton goes on to account for other marginalized groups and to summon every Protestant "who himself maintains the same Principles" to "tolerate such men as these" (*YP*, 8:424-26). After twelve years of state suppression of Nonconformists, new opportunities had emerged for religious comprehension, and Milton's tract reaffirms Protestant principles as biblicist principles.[42] His tract associates the Socinians (as do their despisers) with the Arians; but at this late stage Milton, however seemingly lost his cause, tries to defend both anti-trinitarian groups. These so-called heretics too, he now insists, hew to fundamental Protestant ideals. Milton had long been a "Socinian" himself insofar as that word could be (and, by the orthodox, often was) used imprecisely to refer to a writer who favored rational faith and advocated broader religious toleration.[43] Yet here Milton voices support for the sect defined in more exacting terms. To sum up the development: whereas the criticisms in the *De Doctrina* underline the author's distance from the Socinians, a distance attributable in part to his Arianism, the apology in *Of True Religion* establishes his increased proximity to them.[44] To

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[42] The exclusion of Catholics was integral to such an inclusive vision. See Elizabeth Sauer, "Milton's *Of True Religion*, Protestant Nationhood, and the Negotiation of Liberty," *Milton Quarterly* 40 (2006): 1-19.
[43] On the terminological problems see Marshall, "Locke, Socinianism."
[44] For an intermediary position—the hint of an "Arianized Socinianism" late in *Paradise Lost*—see John Rogers, "Milton and the Heretical Priesthood of Christ," in *Heresy, Literature, and Politics in Early Modern English Culture*, ed. Loewenstein and Marshall, 203-20, at 213.

be clear, no available evidence supports an identification of the late Milton's thinking with Socinianism. But the striking difference between these two ways of orienting himself to the burgeoning school of heterodox thought supports the claim that Milton's view of it evolved in the intervening period.[45]

Paradise Regain'd, I have been suggesting, also substantiates such a claim. If the brief epic's Christ remains a god-man, he nevertheless has deeper affinities with the revisionist Son drawn by the Socinians than with the orthodox god-men proposed by their critics. Indeed, Milton's poem extricates the figure of the god-man from orthodox apologetics. To say as much is to accept that Milton's support for Socinianism increased.[46] But it is also to recall the humility of the *De Doctrina*'s conclusion about the two-natured unity of Christ: "we do not know how it is so" (*YP*, 6:424). This christological uncertainty, the sort of strenuous unknowing that nowhere turns up in Howes's *Christ, God-Man*, for example, might mark a site of potential change. We can say at a minimum that the poet of *Paradise Regain'd* was soon to urge toleration for Socinians who reject such terms as "Trinity, Triniunity, Coessentiality, Tripersonality," on the basis that these are "Scholastic Notions, not to be found in Scripture," and was soon to reinforce a view of Scripture as "plain and perspicuous." In these phrases of Milton's we can detect some familiarity with the nearly identical language that John Biddle uses to eviscerate orthodox English Protestants who,

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[45] Even Michael Lieb, who tends toward extreme caution in comparing Milton with the Socinians, acknowledges that "by the time Milton published *Of True Religion, Haeresie, Schism, Toleration* in 1673, the year before his death, his views had apparently undergone a transformation, at least as far as radical movements such as Socinianism are concerned." "Milton and the Socinian Heresy," in *Milton and the Grounds of Contention*, ed. Mark R. Kelley, Lieb, and John T. Shawcross (Pittsburgh: Duquesne Univ. Press, 2003), 234-83, at 256-57.

[46] As Stephen Dobranski recommends, critics "ought not to take for granted Milton's constancy." "Licensing Milton's Heresy," 154.

> hunting after obscurities, have by the cunning of Satan lost themselves in the endless mazes of error and superstition; and erecting a new Babel, confounded the pure and plain language of the holy Spirit with their *Triunities, Coessentialities, Modalities, eternal Generations, eternal Processions, Incarnations, Hypostatical Unions,* and the like monstrous terms, fitter for Conjurers then Christians, especially such as profess to reject the inventions of men, and keep themselves wholly to the word of God.[47]

Milton was almost certainly aware of Biddle, the Socinian writer who is assaulted by Tombes in *Emmanuel; or God-Man*, not least from the part Biddle played in the fracas over the *Racovian Catechisme*, the Socinian manifesto whose publication in Latin Milton had, scholars think, controversially approved.[48] The poet doubtless knew the controversialist's defenders well, and it's hard to credit the thought that he didn't also know the controversialist's work.[49]

Son of a Gloucestershire tailor, Biddle earned an M.A. at Magdalen Hall, Oxford, in 1641, where he then worked as a tutor before taking up a post as a schoolmaster back in Gloucester. By the middle of the 1640s Biddle had been jailed for publicly rejecting the Trinity. Numerous other imprisonments were to follow. His first major publication denies

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[47] John Biddle, *A Confession of Faith touching the Holy Trinity, according to the Scripture*, in *The Apostolical and True Opinion concerning the Holy Trinity, Revived and Asserted* (London, 1653), sigs. E1v - E2r. This text was originally published as a stand-alone pamphlet in 1648. *The Apostolical and True Opinion* combines it, slightly revised, with the earlier pamphlet *XII Arguments Drawn out of the Scripture: Wherein the commonly-received opinion touching the deity of the Holy Spirit is clearly and fully refuted* (London, 1647). The combined text was later reprinted in the influential collection *The Faith of One God . . . Asserted and Defended, In Several Tracts* (London, 1691-1702).

[48] See Smith, "'And if God was one of us,'" 168; and Barbara Lewalski, *The Life of John Milton: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 284 (and note 30).

[49] Lewalski, *Life of Milton*, 285, 328. Nigel Smith, building on the likelihood that Milton licensed the *Racovian Catechisme*, also avers that by the 1650s Milton "must surely have heard of John Biddle." "'And if God was one of us,'" 176. Smith's essay supplies an accessible introduction to Biddle's life and career on which I rely in the following paragraph.

the godhood of the Holy Spirit, and in *A Confession of Faith touching the Holy Trinity* (1648; 1653), from which I have just quoted, Biddle rejects the divinity of Christ. His text minimizes the Passion, rewrites the Atonement, and drastically reconsiders the Son's connection to the Father. Biddle plays up the natural manhood of the Son. He argues that Christ attained to coincidence with God only in specific and temporally circumscribed moments: in the performance of miracles. Tombes and his ilk, as I have shown in this section, reacted by insisting on Christ's eternal place in the triune godhead. For these critics of Socinianism, the incarnate god-man conjoins two different modes of Christ's existence, his timeless divinity and his humanity. For Biddle, by contrast, such a union in Christ must amount to a provisional link between the essential man Jesus and the one true God: *god-man* names an event rather than an identity. Biddle's Socinian Christ doesn't issue from a divine life that was already his before the foundations of the world. Instead, as I remarked early on, he awaits the Resurrection and the new creation. The futural orientation of his *Confession* prompts Biddle to develop a novel, anti-metaphysical conception of Christ's divine form.

This is a neglected context of controversy in which *Paradise Regain'd* intervenes. Rather than release, in tandem with Howes, Arrowsmith, and Tombes, a god-man against English Socinianism, Milton reconsiders and at times embraces Socinian ideas in his brief epic. One facet of this reconsideration that calls for further attention is the poem's stylistic austerity, which aspires to the biblical plainness on which Biddle and other anti-trinitarian writers erect their arguments.[50] My own case for continuity between Biddle's Christ and the

[50] The relationship between stylistic austerity and anti-trinitarian polemic sorely wants consideration in, for example, Jeffrey S. Shoulson, "Milton and Enthusiasm: Radical Religion and the Poetics of *Paradise Regained*," *Milton Studies* 47 (2008): 219-57.

brief epic's hero, however, turns upon Socinian temporality. I will show that the conceptualization of the Son of God in Biddle's *Confession* privileges time, endurance, and action. Chronology becomes a precondition and not a problem for rational Christology. Into such a temporal ambit Milton's Son also moves in *Paradise Regain'd*. Advancing beyond the uncertainty of the *De Doctrina Christiana* he discovers, within a different order of indeterminacy, the possibility of miraculous action. The god-man may become a figure of the poem's time.

BIDDLE'S TEMPORALITY AND THE BRIEF EPIC'S HERO

I will organize my comparison around three different aspects of chronology in Biddle's text. But first let me approach the brief epic's preoccupation with temporality on its own terms, two of them in particular. *Paradise Regain'd* manifests its time-mindedness in the recurrent local opposition between the wiles of Satan and the *while*s of obedience. Milton's initial verse-paragraph introduces the homophony. The speaker "Who e're while the happy Garden sung" now sings of Paradise's recovery through "one man" whose "firm obedience," fully tested, "foil[s]" the tempter "in all his wiles."[51] Like his hero, obedient rather than belated, the poet finds in the waiting the triumph on which he waits. Later the angels in heaven reassert the homophony, "while" being associated with their music, a modulation of hand and voice that lauds the Son's wisdom, which they say will conquer Satan's "hellish wiles" (*PR*, I.171-75). The scene soon changes, in what Abraham Stoll calls a drastic break, from heaven to earth. Yet the time remains the same. Book I's shift relies on

[51] John Milton, *Paradise Regain'd*, in *The 1671 Poems*, ed. Laura Lunger Knoppers, volume 2 of *The Complete Works of John Milton*, ed. Thomas N. Corns and Gordon Campbell (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008-), I.1-6; hereafter abbreviated *PR* and cited parenthetically by book and line numbers.

temporality, on "while," to coordinate the two locations. Milton thereby introduces time's potential to unify otherwise disparate moments—its hyphenating function. "Mean while the Son of God," the transitional sentence begins; and it ends as the Son, pondering his office, "entre[s] now the bordering Desert wild" (*PR*, I.183, 193). "While" maintains a connection with heaven, correlating patience with the triumph foreseen by the angels. "Wild," hinting at those "wiles" already eloquent of Satan, brings disobedience into view. Illustratively disrupting this associative pattern is the banquet sequence, in which the Son rebuffs the trappings of Satan's table (*PR*, III.1-6). Eventually the foiled tempter "collect[s]" his "wiles" to set them anew. But his immediate response to rejection is to be astonished for "a while." Satan becomes temporarily enmeshed, I think, in the rejection meant to repel him.[52] The patience carried in "while" catches up even the tempter, taking the place, for three lines' time, of the "wiles" he has momentarily dropped.

Such a contained reversal of *while* and *wile* prepares for an exchange that plays up Christ's timeliness in *Paradise Regain'd*. Satan extends to the Son the offer of political power, a desire for which might be reinforced (Satan surmises) by some need to confirm scriptural prophecy (*PR*, III.171-76). Making useable material out of his target's already trying patience, the tempter endeavors to translate "the while," the time that is required between promise and fulfillment, into a wile of its own:

> So shalt thou best fullfil, best verifie
> The Prophets old, who sung thy endless raign,
> The happier raign the sooner it begins,

[52] The suggestion nods to William Kerrigan, *The Sacred Complex: On the Psychogenesis of "Paradise Lost"* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1983), 97-125.

Raign then; what canst thou better do the while?

To whom our Saviour answer thus return'd.

All things are best fullfil'd in their due time,

And time there is for all things, Truth hath said[.] (*PR*, III.177-83)

Satan's offer of power assumes that Christ's sojourn in the desert is empty time, like a container in need of filling, rather than the end of an education. The tempter's attempt at a forceful command ("Raign then") is mitigated, however, by the rhythm of these lines. Compressed between the final syllable of "begins" and the monosyllable "then," the near-rhyme of which reinforces the rhythmic tendency to stress these two sounds across the line-break, "Raign" strives for an emphasis it cannot quite attain. The monosyllabic command achieves, if we apply Derek Attridge's metrical terminology, only a demoted stress.[53] Rhythmically the passage encourages a stress on "then" (opposed by implication to the tempting *now*), and the meter reinforces the kind of patience that Satan asks Christ to forgo.

The beginning of the Son's retort plays with rhythmic variation too, but in a way that reinforces his seeming intention. At the end of his first quoted line, an example of the common device that Attridge terms a rising inversion,[54] the phrase "in their" operates as a double offbeat. Such a case requires compensation elsewhere in the line, and this one finds it in the successive stressed beats that follow: "due time." The line's rhythmic fulfillment arrives in the end, in "due time." Christ's second line reverses this procedure and deploys a falling inversion, in Attridge's estimation a rarer tactic. After the anticipated beats at "time" and "is," the phrase "all things" takes (with some surprise) successive stresses, the tension of

[53] See Derek Attridge, *The Rhythms of English Poetry* (London: Longman, 1982), esp. 174-93.
[54] Cf. Derek Attridge, *Poetic Rhythm: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995), 117-22.

which is only prolonged by a subsequent comma. Only after this pause, and the rhythmic expeditiousness of the compensatory double offbeat "Truth hath," can the line finally resume metrical regularity at Christ's word "said." Getting to truth requires waiting on "all things," but the work of waiting on all things, it turns out, is just what Truth has given its time for. At the atomic level of prosody, this sequence corroborates what critics have long perceived as a material concern of *Paradise Regain'd*: the Son's sensitivity to time.[55]

Insofar as the sequence is self-reflexive—suggestive of the poem's own "due time," time enough for even a brief epic to encompass "all things"—it associates interpretive endurance with exertion, not passivity. When present-day readers like Peter Herman ignore this association and complain that Milton's work neglects to act, they make of satanic logic a misplaced indictment.[56] Like the tempter they maintain that the Son's time needs filling. Accordingly they miss one distinction drawn by this poem about patience: attunement to unfolding time is not unresponsive acquiescence. Such readers mistake Christ's assertion to Satan for a rebuke to Milton: "But I endure the time, till which expir'd," these readers seem to say to the poem, "thou hast permission on me" (*PR*, IV.174-75). Of course it was of *Paradise Lost* that Samuel Johnson quipped, "None ever wished it longer than it is."[57] Yet *Paradise Regain'd* does more than its lengthier predecessor to cultivate readerly patience as a self-conscious theme. The poem equates endurance with sensitivity to time. Further, the poem suggests that, far from disbarring action, such sensitivity itself does genuine work.

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[55] For a recent discussion of the brief epic and post-Restoration temporalities of Nonconformity, see Sharon Achinstein, *Literature and Dissent in Milton's England* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003), 130-38.

[56] See note 16, above.

[57] Johnson, "Milton," 290.

These considerations of temporality expose strong continuities between Milton's brief epic and Biddle's *Confession of Faith touching the Holy Trinity*.

(a) Identity and Education

Biddle's anti-trinitarianism conditions his radical Christology, and his resulting sense of the Son's identity makes for the first link with the time of *Paradise Regain'd*. Biddle disputes that Christ has an inherent divine nature; he deems the Incarnation unbiblical and discounts the stubborn idea that Christ's humanity was but a vessel for his divinity.[58] For Biddle the Christ of the New Testament is a man who "*hath no other than a humane nature*" (*Conf.*, 19). He is "not *the Son of God in power* [. . .] by having the Divine Nature personally united to his Humane Nature, but by the Glorification and Exaltation of his very Humane Nature" (*Conf.*, 38-9).[59] God exalts this Socinian Jesus when he raises him from the dead and names him Lord (*Conf.*, 3). His divinity and lordship come to the Son as gifts from his Father, prepared at his birth and cultivated in his life, but not fully bequeathed to him until his resurrection. Such a forward-looking approach to Christology disarms the materialist question of how divine stuff constitutes Jesus's body. Yet Biddle does affirm that the Son was "a child conceived of the holy Spirit in the Virgins womb" (*Conf.*, 11; cf. 26). The translated *Racovian Catechisme* likewise states that Christ "was conceived of the Holy Spirit, and born of the Virgin *Mary*, and therefore is from his very conception and birth the Son of God."[60] With unflinching literalism, the title "Son of God" refers in these texts to Jesus's paternity. God

[58] Biddle, *A Confession of Faith touching the Holy Trinity*, 11; hereafter abbreviated *Conf.* and cited parenthetically by page number. Milton, recall, accepts in the *De Doctrina* the biblical evidence for the Incarnation.
[59] This articulation of Biddle's view affirms its direct opposition to the *assumendo* of John Howes.
[60] *The Racovian Catechisme*, 27.

through the Spirit activated the conception of a new creature.[61] Still, God's essence is incommunicable to created beings: he is without beginning, and his properties include immortality and immutability.[62] So according to the theology of the *Confession* and the *Catechisme*, the Christ conceived of God must be an essential human: he is conceived in human matter that cannot possibly receive the divine form. To venture an anachronism, his useable DNA comes only from his mother. Thus these texts skirt around paradox even as they assert that the biological father of the man Jesus is the one true God.[63]

Biddle envisions a Christ who has his origin in time—created by God for a natural human life—and who was exalted later in time—honored with deity when he was raised from the dead. Earthly time acts as the ground of the Son's life and reign. This ontological assertion finds parallels in *Paradise Regain'd*, as does Biddle's epistemological corollary. Biddle's *Confession* notes that the Gospel of John refers to Christ as the Word, God's self-proclamation. But how does the essential man Jesus know what to say of God? The answer proposed by Biddle is simple: God tells him. In unfurling John 1, Biddle explains that Christ the Word was "the immediate Interpreter of God, by whom he [i.e., God] revealed his Counsel touching our Salvation, as we are wont to disclose our secrets by our words." So

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[61] Seeing the Holy Spirit as an angelic person, Biddle departs both from Faustus Socinus (who like Milton views the Holy Spirit as God's agency or efficacy) and from Athanasian orthodoxy (which identifies the Spirit as the third person of the triune godhead). *Conf.*, 55-56; see also Smith, "'And if God was one of us,'" 165-67.

[62] *The Racovian Catechisme*, 28.

[63] Biddle relies on the distinctiveness of Jesus's birth and divine office to counter arguments that his Socinian views reduce Christ to one among many "sons of God." As another article of the *Confession* laboriously declares, "*Thus though some faithful man be a Son of God, subordinate to the chief Son of God Christ Jesus, yet may we not thereupon say, that there is another Son of God, or two Sons of God, (since that would be to make another, or two Sons of God by way of Excellency, whereas there can be but one such a Son) howbeit otherwise the Scripture warrant us to say, that there are many Sons of God.*" *Conf.*, 43. Smith points out, however, that late in life Biddle moved outside of typical Socinian thought by ascribing a body to God, one "that existed in a specific place and which had a specific shape." "'And if God was one of us,'" 169.

when St. John avows that "the Word was with God," Biddle supplies the gloss that Christ was "taken up into Heaven, that so he might talk with God, and be indeed his *Word*, or the immediate Interpreter of his Will, and receive the most certain and absolute knowledg [*sic*] of the Kingdom of Heaven, which he was to propose to men: [. . .] namely, before he began to preach the Gospel" (*Conf.*, 39-40).[64] Against the orthodox interpretation that Christ exists eternally with God, Biddle and the Socinians take John to imply that the human Son temporarily rose from the earth to heaven.[65] To qualify for his role as God's interpreter, Jesus—acting as always in time—took lessons from God. Only a student so directly schooled could share God's secrets with the world. When John later describes the Word "*going forth from the Father*," Biddle takes the evangelist to mean that after the completion of Christ's tutelage his ministry may commence. John's phrase on such a reading conveys spatial, not metaphysical, movement. "Going forth" by no means expresses the mystical embodiment of a preexistent Son who assumes a second nature. Instead it designates a return trip to Christ's ground in the world, a "Locall Procession of Christ from God [. . .] before the discharge of his Embassy" (*Conf.*, 40). In the fourth gospel Biddle perceives the man Jesus ascending to God to learn his message, then descending to "publis[h] the Gospel" abroad (*Conf.*, 39). His education looks forward to his ministry.

That God sires a Son who nevertheless seems fully human is one indicator of the functional Socinianism of *Paradise Regain'd*. Milton draws energy from the view of Christ's

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[64] Compare *The Racovian Catechisme*'s handling of the same passage: "Jesus himself did in the most perfectest manner, learn [God's will] of God, in the heavens, and was magnificently sent from thence to publish it unto men, and did accordingly declare it unto them, which is most apparent from those appellations that in the Scripture are attributed to him, whilst it calleth him the Word, or Speech of God" (71).

[65] John Marshall remarks that "Socinians usually interpreted this passage to speak of a pre-ascension ascension." "Locke, Socinianism," 154. See also McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England*, 201.

identity espoused by Biddle: that the Son's secondary divinity is extrinsic, bestowed in time, and yet that God is by miracle Jesus's biological father. The poet also gathers material from the process that fortifies Biddle's reading of John 1: the education of the Word. Milton's God introduces the conundrum of identity in a Book I address to Gabriel, referring to his son's "birth divine" and recalling how Mary was told "that on her should come | The Holy Ghost" (*PR*, I.138-40). To conclude the same speech, though, God lauds Jesus as "this perfect Man, by merit call'd my Son" (*PR*, I.166). His address combines the truth that the Son's birth is miraculous with the insight that the Son has attained his inessential perfection by effort in a time-bound life. Now readers might contend that Milton makes room in this speech for the co-existence of Christ's divine nature (implied by his divine birth) and his human one (suggested by his manly merit). This contention harks back to Barbara Lewalski's idea of a kenotic Christ who recovers access to his preexistent divinity through flashes of insight.[66] But Biddle supplies an alternative position, one that sorts well with what Mary says in Milton's poem and with what Satan (trying to isolate his adversary's divinity) cannot say.

Mary allows that Christ can be both a son of God in pedigree and a human in nature. In a revelatory speech the mother of Jesus tells her child,

> thou art no Son of mortal man,
> Though men esteem thee low of Parentage,
> Thy Father is the Eternal King, who rules
> All Heaven and Earth, Angels and Sons of men[.] (*PR*, I.234-37)

[66] For his part Biddle can't abide the idea of a deactivated divinity: if the suffering Christ of Scripture was fully God and fully man, he asks in frustration, why would he need "in his agony to be strengthened by an Angel? would not the Divine Nature in Christ, at this rate, be in the mean time idle and useless?" *Conf.*, 28.

Yet she also appeals to Jesus to rise as high as "sacred vertue and true worth" can take him (*PR*, I.231). These heights reach all the way to "*David*'s Throne," she marvels (*PR*, I.240), and indeed Mary's maternal aspirations center on earthly kingship. While she does confirm that a divine king acted as Christ's father, Mary also stresses the human crown that in time will descend to the child, according to *Paradise Regain'd*, through her own line.[67] Elsewhere in Christian tradition lauded as *theotokos*, the blessed bearer of the Son of God, Mary figures more significantly in this passage as the genealogical bearer of the Davidic legacy. Thus can she nourish her child both with the awareness of a divine lord, his father by miracle, and with the hope of human lordship, his promise by her own motherly mediation. Mary deploys the trope of kingship to evoke a miraculous birth, yes, but also to forecast the glory that will devolve to Jesus once, "full grown to Man" (*PR*, II.83), he attains the fullness of his natural humanity.[68] It is through this bright human hope that Mary contributes to the futural orientation of her son and Milton's poem.

Satan remains caught in a different logic of identity. Trying "to understand [his] Adversary" (*PR*, IV.527), he alights on the idea of a divine-human composite. However, Satan then does what Milton the theologian (as I began this chapter by noting) will not: the tempter skims past the Son's humanity. In the first instance of the process, Satan leaves open the suggestion that Jesus may be only the half-brother of the hero of *Paradise Lost*:

> His Mother then is mortal, but his Sire,

[67] Satan later makes the significant observation that Jesus stands in David's lineage on his mother's side (*PR*, III.152-54). At least to Satan's watchful eye, and against the authority of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, the royalty to which Jesus may accede in *Paradise Regain'd* appears to be his specifically maternal inheritance.

[68] Compare Biddle's contention that "the Scripture [. . .] whilst it calleth Christ a man, speaketh of him as a Person, in that it speaketh of him as a Mediator, Embassador, Saviour, Lord, Judge, or King, all which are the names of Persons; all actions and offices belonging to Persons onely, as such." *Conf.*, 21.

He who obtains the Monarchy of Heav'n,

And what will he [i.e., God] not do to advance his Son?

His first-begot we know, and sore have felt[.] (*PR*, I.86-89)

Still "sore" with the impressions of self-interested memory, the speaker underplays Christ's mortality, foregoing his attention to Mary to ruminate on God. For humanity strikes Satan as a deficient explanatory set for the Son, a man much greater than Adam, the tempter later remarks, "If he be Man by Mothers side at least, | With more then humane gifts from Heaven adorn'd" (*PR*, II.135-37). This brief description likewise starts with hybridity but shades into something else. Satan accords Jesus a qualified half-humanity. Then he supplements his picture of the Son with divinity. Finally Satan fixates on Christ's divine aspect, the addition become the base. Humanity is allowed but overlaid: Adam and Eve were so very gullible, after all. Satan, perhaps understandably falling prey to the inducements of orthodoxy, grants the humanity of the Son only to isolate what must be the more germane truth of his divinity. The crown of this christological method appears in Satan's speech before the pinnacle temptation. By now the tempter has tried the Son only to the limits of human capacity, he thinks, and he observes that the title "Son of God [. . .] bears no single sence." So he aims for the experimental isolation I have been describing. "To know what more thou art then man, | Worth naming Son of God," Satan announces, "another method I must now begin" (*PR*, IV.517, 538-40). He wants to extract this "what more [. . .] then," which carries with it the "With more then" of an earlier example. What more than a man is Jesus? Socinian ideas like Biddle's elaborate for *Paradise Regain'd* both an answer to this

question of identity and a simple sense in which Christ, no more than a man, is yet God's unique son. The tempter, unlike Mary, never sees the two possibilities as compatible.

The late Milton's consistency with Socinian thought also extends to what I have called the epistemological corollary to claims for Christ's mere manhood. Rereading John 1, Biddle finds that before the human Son embarks on his public ministry, he ascends to heaven to learn the secrets of God. The preparatory education of the man Jesus likewise defines the chronological boundaries of Milton's brief epic, which dramatizes the examination of Christ in the desert and culminates in a call for the successful hero to "*begin* to save mankind" (*PR,* IV.635; my emphasis). By writing a sequel that ends at that beginning, Milton at least implicitly addresses the Socinian reinterpretation of Christ as the educated Word. But the poet, perhaps doing Biddle one better, offers an even more radical vision of his hero's essential humanity. For Milton's Jesus lacks authoritative instructions about his mission. He attains self-awareness through the limited language of his earthly mother rather than the directives of his heavenly father, through earthbound study and reflection rather than ascension and conference in heaven. The instruction of the Son in *Paradise Regain'd* seems, in short, altogether human. He needs only that occasional teacher Satan to examine him.

Early on, Milton's "perfect man" (*PR*, I.166) anguishes over the disparity between the person he now is and the future greatness he is promised.[69] Surely such anxiety makes him more sympathetic than Biddle's Christ, an essential human who nonetheless finds

[69] Reverberations abound in Milton's thought. See for instance Sonnet VII ("my late spring no bud or blossom sheweth") in John Milton, *Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. John Carey (London: Longman, 1971), 147-48.

heavenly direction in determining what to do.[70] Christ's initial speech brings out his dilemma:

> O what a multitude of thoughts at once
> Awaken'd in me swarm, while I consider
> What from within I feel my self, and hear
> What from without comes often to my ears,
> Ill sorting with my present state compar'd. (*PR*, I.196-200)

"What from within" and "What from without" ring consecutively, one chiming the uncertain present and the other the promised future. Then the final line coordinates the two. Christ's thoughts swarm amid the unsettled work of comparatively "sorting" the internal with the external, the now and the then. Jesus's program of self-knowledge thus runs into the initial challenge of defining the self to be known.[71] But later in the Son's monologue, his voice gives way at mid-line to Mary's, and the poem works through the problem of collating "within" and "without":

> These growing thoughts my Mother soon perceiving
> By words at times cast forth inly rejoyc'd,
> And said to me apart, high are thy thoughts
> O Son, but nourish them and let them soar[.] (*PR*, I.227-30)

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[70] But note Northrop Frye's countering claim that "*dramatically* Christ becomes an increasingly unsympathetic figure" as the poem proceeds. "The Typology of *Paradise Regained*," *Modern Philology* 53 (1956): 227-38, at 234.

[71] Compare Matthew 16:13: "When Jesus came into the coasts of Cæsarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" *The Bible: Authorized King James Version*, ed. Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997); hereafter cited parenthetically.

That glorious caesura at "apart" effaces the break it names, merging the speeches separated by it. Wherever Mary first spoke the words that follow, almost thirty lines' worth, they can no longer be detached from the consciousness that has subsumed them and now repeats them. Even a line break would imply too much separation between the revolving thoughts of the Son and the fully internalized words of his mother.[72] She proceeds to tell the Son, or rather the Son remembers her telling him, of his divine father and of his prophesied future. These words from his earthly mother—mediated in time through speech and memory—have found reinforcement in Jesus's careful reading of the Scriptures, which carry the words—mediated through text and tradition—of his heavenly father. All such words from without already resound within, the Son's monologue concludes. Only their timely articulation is wanted for the Word to be wholly educated. The sequence illustrates that Milton adopts but also revises the Socinian Christ who finds equipment for ministry through God's direct instruction. The poet draws a Son who takes himself, a self humanly shaped by a mother's voice and a distant father's book, alone into the desert to finish his learning.

(b) New Creation

Such an emphasis on education lines up the identity of the human Son with the promises he may realize in the future. Bound up with this orientation, which serves to deemphasize the orthodox and Arian idea of a precedent divine nature, is another aspect of Biddle's Christology: the Messiah's connection with the new, and dissociation from the old, creation. Both emphases are traceable to Biddle's assessment of the prologue to the Gospel

[72] See Rumrich, "Milton's *Theanthropos*," 62.

of John. Historically a potent proof-text for trinitarians,[73] John 1 commences "In the beginning," words long thought to allude to the Genesis creation narrative. Biddle rejects this reading in the *Confession*. Making a localist claim that resounds frequently in his biblical criticism, the controversialist insists that St. John's concerns are specific to his own story, not referable to some overarching typological superstructure. To unpack the phrase "*In the beginning*," Biddle therefore adds a parenthesis: "not of the World, but of the Gospel [. . .] for these words [*in the beginning*] are wont to be restrained to the matter in hand, which here is the Gospel, as appeareth from the very appellation of the *Word*, which is here given to Christ, in regard of his Propheticall Office, in publishing the Gospel" (*Conf*., 39; brackets in the original). "In the beginning" now begins John's story, which is to say Christ's—not the Old Testament's. When the prologue further says that "all things were made by [the Word]" (John 1:3), Biddle eschews the orthodox view that an eternal Christ was present with God before time began and was the instrument of the first creation. After all, avers Biddle, if the Word is himself God, as the orthodox believe, then the Word in John is "said to be with himself, which is ridiculous" (*Conf*., 41). Earlier in the *Confession*, having declared that only the Spirit was with God at the first creation,[74] Biddle spells out the principle of localized signification that he repeats when glossing John's gospel: "it is well that the holy Scripture, while [i.e., when] it attributeth creation unto Christ, doth, what by the nature of the thing it self, what by the circumstances of the places, what by express words, signifie that it is meant

[73] For a recent reception study, see Kyle Keefer, *The Branches of the Gospel of John: The Reception of the Fourth Gospel in the Early Church* (London: T&T Clark, 2006).
[74] On Biddle's anti-trinitarian understanding of the Holy Spirit, see above, note 61.

not of the first and old creation, but of the second and new, consisting in the reduction of things to a new state, condition, or order" (*Conf*., 7).

Biddle's treatment radically reinterprets the trope of prolepsis in the Johannine prologue. The biblical text proceeds from the Word's place "in the beginning," through the Word's creative work, ahead to the Word "made flesh" (John 1:1, 1:14). The orthodox assume that John makes one kind of proleptic leap here: from a trinitarian Christ's presence at the first creation, the gospel as they read it jumps ahead to Christ's incarnate present in the world he made. By implication the Son continues the work begun at the founding of the world. Biddle, though, sees in the same text a different leap, one that moves ahead from Christ's education. John bounds from that event—for Biddle the forming of the Word—forward to the new creation that will be wrought by Christ's resurrection. Biddle reads St. John's prolepsis to anticipate this new order, a reconstituted reality in which "all things were made by" the Word. (The rest of John's gospel fills out the tract of time between education and resurrection.) Biddle adopts a view of Christ's historicity, then, that refuses to look back to Genesis. Reading only forward from the Word's education, Biddle aligns himself with the emphatic supernaturalism of Faustus Socinus, for whom, as one historian explains, "Christianity had nothing to do with human nature, but was based instead upon the revelation made by Christ in time, at a particular point in history."[75] This Son does not bring the old order to its culmination. Indeed, the familiar Socinian emphasis on the natural manhood of Christ must not overshadow the further point that his post-resurrection body

[75] Mortimer, *Reason and Religion*, 22.

represents, to someone like Biddle, a rending of the fabric of nature. The Socinian Christ is a man whose gratuitous resurrection marks a rupture that makes all things new.

I am building a case that Milton's brief epic adopts the future-directedness of the Socinians. But I must also acknowledge the prominent difference between the Socinian temporality of the Son and the Arian viewpoint manifested in *Paradise Lost*. The theological problem of Christ's existence before the Incarnation divides the two camps, the Socinians denying it and the Arians accepting it. To interpret St. John's declaration that the Word made the world, for instance, the *Racovian Catechisme* discusses the evangelist's proleptic implication that Christ makes the "world to come" and establishes new conditions of human possibility, conditions like those which he and the angels already experience. This exegesis clarifies the Socinian understanding that Christ joined and assumed lordship over the angels only after his resurrection: "after God had raised Christ from the dead, and given glory to him, all the things both in the heavens, and on the earth, were by him reformed, and reduced to another state and condition, in that he became the Head of Angells and Men, who before acknowledged God only for their Lord."[76] Note the dissonance between this itinerary and the sequence that Raphael recounts in *Paradise Lost*, according to which God (acting before the creation of the earth) deems the preexistent Son the head of the angels:

> This day I have begot whom I declare
> My only Son, and on this holy hill
> Have him anointed, whom ye now behold
> At my right hand; your head I him appoint[.] (*PL*, V.603-6)

[76]*The Racovian Catechisme*, 46-47.

This christening occasions the whole action of the epic: the invention of evil, the War in Heaven, the fall of humanity, the promise of redemption. In practice a futural Socinianism like Biddle's diminishes such a prehistory by keying scriptural passages to the resurrected, not the preexistent, Christ. Early in his story, the Socinian Son can lay claim to being the educated Word, but only by rhetorical anticipation is he the "Head of Angells and Men." It is, according to the Socinians, only at Christ's resurrection that God raises his obedient human Son above his fellow creatures.

A concern for poetry as well as theology, Christ's preexistence also divides *Paradise Lost* from *Paradise Regain'd*. As I have tried to show, the hero of the latter work conceives of himself largely as the Socinians interpret him: as an essential man who happens to have the one God for his father. This Son neither harbors any knowledge of a prior heavenly life nor discerns any such preexistence in the revelations afforded by Mary and Scripture. Critics who presuppose full theological continuity between the epic and its sequel consequently need recourse to a case that the Son in *Paradise Regain'd* has forgotten his true self. Milton's Christ looks intently forward, these critics figure, because he has forgotten what's behind him. Deftly elaborating such a position, John Rogers proposes that the hero's memory of his heavenly forelife has "been emptied out along with his divinity at the kenosis of his incarnation as a man: the Son of *Paradise Regained*, quite simply, knows no time when he was not as now."[77] Rogers understandably wants to anchor the late Milton in Arianism. He presumes that the Arian Son of the *De Doctrina Christiana* and of *Paradise Lost* reappears, albeit with amnesia, in the brief epic. This framing puts Rogers in the distinguished

[77] John Rogers, "*Paradise Regained* and the Memory of *Paradise Lost*," in *The Oxford Handbook of Milton*, ed. Nicholas McDowell and Nigel Smith (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009), 589-612, at 596.

christological company of Milton's Satan: unable to accept the humanity of Christ as a sufficient explanation, both end up prioritizing his divinity. Yet once more the preexistent Son's divine nature counts as the significant variable: for Rogers it is the Son who preexists textually in the *De Doctrina*. Too hastily does this critical procedure fix the brief epic within a theology of the preexistent Word. Too readily does it look back to Milton's theological treatise for fixed truths. Later I will return to the formidable question of how the poem relates to its predecessor. Suffice it to say here that in order to perceive *Paradise Regain'd* as a reconsideration of the god-man (a project impelled by the conviction that "we do not know how it is so"), critics must account more fully for the poem's own insistence on looking forward.

While the poem's hero demonstrates time-sensitive patience, the work itself assumes a structural patience, adopting even in its conclusion a posture of open expectancy. This futural positioning correlates with Socinian temporality largely because of the object of the work's waiting: the poem implicitly looks ahead to the Resurrection of Christ. In the finale, once Jesus has overcome all three of Satan's temptations, the angels return to earth and summon their victorious hero to "begin to save mankind" (*PR*, IV.635). At the risk of anticlimax, the four-line verse-paragraph that follows the angelic song further undercuts any sense of finality even as it concludes the text:

> Thus they the Son of God our Saviour meek
> Sung Victor, and from Heavenly Feast refresh
> Brought on his way with joy; hee unobserv'd
> Home to his Mothers house private return'd. (*PR*, IV.636-39)

His desert examination complete, Christ can set out on his mission, but not without some time for recovery, an extension of his quiet life and his dependence on Mary.[78] Milton's own proleptic inclination, it seems, is to equate "private" readiness with public performance. Once achieved, the former carries within itself the latter. But the readiness nonetheless finds fulfillment in performance. If the hero has by the end, as the poem's initial lines promised, "*Eden* rais'd in the wast Wilderness" (*PR*, I.7), then that paradisiacal lifting only begins the Son's teaching and ministry, which will culminate in his body's being "rais'd" from death into a new order of life.

It took the crucifixion for Christ to be resurrected, though. And an old commonplace of Milton criticism states that the poet was indisposed, at least after the failure of "The Passion," to the imagery of the Cross. It might therefore appear untenable to read Milton's brief epic as oriented toward (if also beyond) the crucifixion. But Charles A. Huttar has, to the contrary, persuasively styled *Paradise Regain'd* as Milton's long-delayed Passion poem. Despite characterizing the poem's theological ambitions in terms more conservative than I find supportable, Huttar provides a compelling demonstration of the poem's broad symbolic "identification of Temptation and Passion."[79] He argues that the poem carefully prepares for the pinnacle scene's adumbration of the Cross and Christ's subsequent resurrection and ascension. The more these implications are recognized as integral to the work, the more *Paradise Regain'd* reads as a Passion poem, one that teases out the traditional paradox that the Son's humiliation unveils his majesty. Huttar proposes that Milton, "fusing

[78] I do not share Gordon Teskey's opinion that the work thus leaves "nothing left for angels to do." *Delirious Milton: The Fate of the Poet in Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2006), 179. But Teskey is right that the human Son has earthly work ahead of him.

[79] Charles A. Huttar, "The Passion of Christ in *Paradise Regained*," *English Language Notes* 19, no. 3 (1982): 236-60, at 252.

two [. . .] figurally identical events in a single narrative," melds into the fiction of the Son's mortification in the desert the analogous action at Calvary.[80] To this convincing argument I have very little to add: only the final few lines of the poem. For if the brief epic does what Huttar says it does, then it also brings Christ down from the pinnacle, from the symbolically presaged cross and the implied resurrection and ascension, and it returns him prominently if privately to his mother's house. The imagistic power of Christ on the pinnacle—structural Passion imagery, no doubt—renders this self-consciously meek conclusion all the more prospective in its effect. Oriented to the future, the final lines await the world-making achievement of what the poem, like the prologue to the Gospel of John, has only prepared itself to figure.

This futural poise implies a disposition also appropriate to the readers imagined by Milton's text, a temporality for working through history until the resurrection. To suggest as much is to identify the religious import of the mortalism that Milton held in common with many Socinians.[81] In a Christian context, mortalism holds that "the soul sleeps or dies with the death of the body to be reawakened or resurrected at the Last Judgment."[82] I have detailed how Biddle and the *Racovian Catechisme* take John 1 to foreshadow the world to come when God resurrects Christ, firstborn of the new creation. For the Socinians, the ethical upshot of this narrative was that God, in raising Christ, had miraculously affirmed the truth of his teachings about obedience. Also seeing this action as a promise to all who follow the

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[80] Huttar, "The Passion of Christ," 251.

[81] For a summary see Nicholas Jolley, "The Relation between Theology and Philosophy," in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), 1:363-92, at 382-85.

[82] Nicholas McDowell, "Dead Souls and Modern Minds?: Mortalism and the Early Modern Imagination, from Marlowe to Milton," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 40 (2010): 559-92, at 559.

Son's moral example—they too will be resurrected—the seventeenth-century Socinians pressed an unapologetic supernaturalism into the service of practical virtue.[83] Characteristically expressed along mortalist lines, this hope keeps human temporality tied to the life of matter. Commit to following Christ, and God will miraculously resurrect you, body and soul, unto eternal life. In so doing God will make an exception to the fate that otherwise lies in wait: not the death-in-life of hell-bound torment, but just death, the demise of body and soul.[84] Again, this new order is made available—exemplified and communicated—by Christ's resurrection, but from the vantage of the living it will take a long time for all followers to awaken to its fullness. From first to last Milton positions *Paradise Regain'd* toward resurrection: from Mary's assurance that her son will someday be king, to Christ's patience to await that crown and not to have it foisted upon him, to the angels' final song about the onset of the Son's ministry. The hero at the end of the poem must still live and work well, must still anticipate fulfillments that will only occur—whether he knows it or not—when God raises him from the dead. From the standpoint of the mortalism defended by Milton as well as the Socinians, all the same may be said of the reader the poem looks for.

(c) God's Form in Time

Thus far my consideration of *Paradise Regain'd* has emphasized the *man* in *god-man*, correlating the time of the poem with the human nature of the Socinian Christ and the new

[83] Mortimer, *Reason and Religion*, 17-21. Early in her laudable history, Mortimer summarizes the soteriology of the movement's founder: "If people committed themselves to follow Christ, then, Socinus insisted, God would forgive their sins and give them eternal life" (20).
[84] Mortimer, *Reason and Religion*, 19.

order wrought when God resurrects him. The final question to consider, emerging from these concerns, is how the temporality of the brief epic makes possible a coincidence of divine and human forms. Can a seemingly human Son become a god-man? Recall that although Milton's theological treatise argues that Christ the mediator acts as god-man (*YP*, 6:424-25), the *De Doctrina* cannot decide how that hyphen works. I have proposed that the author later revisits, rather than simply imprinting, this metaphysical crux in his brief epic. One might think that Socinianism, insisting on the essential manhood of Jesus, contributes nothing to the problem. Socinian thinkers did try to account, however, for the ostensibly incompatible idea that Christ has a divine form. One such attempt completes the chronology that I have been tracing through John Biddle's *Confession of Faith touching the Holy Trinity*.

Biddle tackles the Son's divinity while interpreting the Christ-hymn early in the second chapter of Philippians, a much-debated Pauline text that praises the Son, "who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: | but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: | and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:6-8).[85] Biddle rejects as unbiblical the doctrine of the Incarnation, with its precondition (also denied by Biddle) of Christ's preexistent life in heaven. But the Christ-hymn demands that the author somehow explain why St. Paul writes that the Son is "in the form of God" and is "equal with God." Biddle, again emphasizing Christ's time-bound earthly life, offers a resolution that associates form with performance.

[85] For present-day theological perspectives on the Christ-hymn, see Ralph P. Martin and Brian J. Dodd, eds., *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998).

His ingenious reading delimits Christ's formal identity with God to discrete moments of power. The author stipulates, in a familiar anti-trinitarian principle, that Christ's essence is distinct from and (like all other essences) subordinate to the one God's. Biddle asserts that the Pauline claim for the Son's equality with the Father therefore "cannot be in respect of Essence, but [must be] of something else" (*Conf.*, 12). Biddle's separation of equality and essence has a narrowing result: "this Equality of Christ with God," he deduces, "is to be extended no farther, than as he was in the form of God." And form for this author, "as appeareth from the common acceptation of the word," denotes "something visible and outwardly apparent, such as is neither the Essence, nor power of any thing, but *onely the exercise and demonstration of power*" (*Conf.*, 13; emphasis added). Biddle abjures the more stable essences of Aristotelian terminology and rewrites Christ's divine form as a short-term phenomenon.[86] "In the exercise therefore and demonstration of divine power, whereby he did miracles," Biddle claims, "was Christ in the form of God, and equal to God" (*Conf.*, 13). Performing a miracle, so this reasoning goes, the doer becomes godlike as the instrument of the deed. The suffix "like" seems apt, for Biddle also turns to the "as if" of simile in restricting Christ's divine form to "the exercise and demonstration of divine Power, whereby he wrought Miracles in as free and uncontrolled a manner, as if God himself had been on the earth" (*Conf.*, 10).[87] Still, the writer does not see these demonstrations as manifesting some flickeringly inconstant divinity in Christ. Rather they underline the Son's continuing

[86] McLachlan acknowledges that "in his literalistic approach to scripture and his rejection of the language of the Schools Bidle [*sic*], like Socinus, avoided one set of pitfalls (those of metaphysics) only to stumble into another (those of forced interpretation of scripture)." *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England*, 195.
[87] The *Racovian Catechisme* also relies upon the figure of "as if" to expound Philippians 2:6: "the equality of Christ with God herein consisteth, that by the power which God conferred on him, he did all those things (and will do them) which pertain to God himself, as if he were very God" (59).

reliance upon the Father, his submission to God's timing. Christ's capacity to actuate the Father's divine power is a gift that, like manna, must be used only for its moment. Biddle explains that St. Paul's rhetorical aim in the passage is to "exhort the *Philippians* to humility" (*Conf.*, 11). The example adduced by the apostle is Christ, the one who had miraculous access to the power of God's form and yet refused to assume it when he needed it most.

That act of exemplary refusal centers Biddle's interpretation of the kenotic self-emptying of Christ, who makes himself, Paul says, "of no reputation" (Phil. 2:7). Since Biddle denies that a preexistent Christ divested himself of divinity to become an embodied man—the orthodox explanation, adaptable to an Arian perspective—the author of the *Confession* takes this phrase about Christ's humiliation to refer to the Passion. By that dark hour the Son, in Biddle's brief but psychologically complex portrait, has learned to experience passing equality with God without losing sight of his permanent subordination to him. Miracles tutor Christ in his dependence on his father by allowing him momentarily to execute his father's power. Performing "as if God himself had been on the earth," Christ adopts a temporary divine form that is other than his own. For Biddle his real triumph, though, occurs in an act of denial. The humiliated Son refuses to grasp for himself God's power when it is not offered as a seasonable gift. He must act as a recipient rather than a usurper. "Christ," expounds Biddle,

> had thought it robbery, or a prey, to have been equal with God in doing miracles, if he had not laid aside the exercise and demonstration of his divine power, and fallen into the hands of his Adversaries, as a weak and vulgar man. For unless he had done so, he had disobeyed the commandment of

> God, and consequently thought his divine form to be a prey [i.e., something stolen], not a gift of God; and that it was to be kept on for his owne glory, not put off for the glory of God. (*Conf.*, 14-15)

The glory of the one true God is reinforced by the wholly human glory of the crucified Christ. Jesus suffers his ignominious death in "vulgar" weakness. He discounts the option of attaining, through one final exercise of God's accessible might, a different sort of glory.[88] As Biddle portrays him, the Son faced at the end of his earthly life the temptation to be equated with God—the same temptation to which Athanasian orthodoxy and English Protestantism, polishing their trinitarian theologies, would eventually succumb. The Son resisted.

Though Biddle does not use the hyphenated term that came to be used against him, his *Confession* unquestionably reveals how the Son may prove a god-man. Christ does so in earthly time through discrete acts of miracle.[89] *God-man* names an event, coordinated by the Father and enacted by the Son, not a hybridized essence or identity. In circumscribed moments of miraculous action divinity and humanity, like empowering energy and empowered actor, wholly coincide. The receptive Son performs visible deeds "as if God himself had been on the earth." Yet Biddle, coordinating his claim about Christ's human identity with his theological future-directedness, ends up diminishing these miracles' significance. He insists that the short-term performances of the god-man serve as mere

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[88] Note the *Racovian Catechisme*'s précis of the Philippians passage: "Christ, who conversed in the world as God, doing the works of God, [. . .] did, when God so willed, and the salvation of man required, become as a servant and vassall, and as one of the vulgar men, when he of his own accord suffered himself to be bound, whipt, and crucified" (55).

[89] With reference to early modern political theory, Mortimer also locates the Socinian Son within human temporality: "For God and Christ to function adequately within [the Socinian] system, the qualities necessary for legal personhood and agency had to be attributed to them. No longer could they be considered as neo-Platonic entities operating outside the human perception of space and time." *Reason and Religion*, 38.

preparations for the final human accomplishment of the human Son. Jesus's victory requires denying heaven as well as earth. If the Son's merit entails forsaking the world and all its trappings, then for Biddle it also depends on his refusal to claim for himself divine power, to adopt formal coincidence with God on his own terms. The Son who could act as god-man comes to triumph as man.

Milton's brief epic most evocatively activates the *topos* of negative action, of refusal as attainment, in Christ's rejection of wealth. Satan, thinking like a political economist, remarks that "great acts require great means of enterprise" (*PR*, II.412), and he offers riches to the would-be king. Christ's response elevates practiced virtue over received kingship. The one "who reigns within himself," declares the Son, "is more than a King" (*PR*, II.466-67). Besides, profligate kings who purport to lead multitudes will in fact be mere slaves to their own "lawless passions" (*PR*, II.472). The Son also adds that inasmuch as monarchs rule only the bodies of their subjects, not their minds or souls, "reigning can be no sincere delight" (*PR*, II.480). Christ concludes the speech by making explicit and deeming emulable the rejection of kingship that he has thus far enacted:

> Besides to give a Kingdom hath been thought
> Greater and nobler done, and to lay down
> Far more magnanimous, then to assume.
> Riches are needless then, both for themselves,
> And for thy reason why they should be sought,
> To gain a Scepter, oftest better miss't. (*PR*, II.481-86)

The kingliest deed—we may think, as perhaps Milton thinks, of Cromwell—is to refuse an offered crown. Not that such authority cannot be conferred later on the one who declines; indeed it might be conferred later only because it is declined for now. Thanks to Milton's caesura after "magnanimous" in the third line above, the possibility of temporal sequence operates underneath the more prominent negative comparison marked by "then." If to lay down a crown is more magnanimous *than* to assume it, perhaps also it is worthier first to lay down the crown, *then* to assume it.

The co-presence of these possibilities reaches toward the traditional paradoxes of the crucified Christ, who suffers thorns that, as it turns out, amount to jewels. I don't want to overstate the pertinence of Socinianism to this broadly common imagery. But the specific atmosphere of the passage does seem to me to bind together the kingliest man with the godliest man. Both attain merit by denying offers of increased power that would undermine rather than support true self-mastery. Both prove themselves worthy of holding, later on, the power that they deny for now. But the praiseworthiness of such a denial depends on the real absence of the thing denied. A queenly woman who refuses the scepter, opting to rule over herself alone, must not already be wearing a concealed crown (perhaps under a wig). If anti-royalism conduces to anti-trinitarianism in this passage, then the Son's riposte is strongly suggestive of the man who displays true godliness by refusing the offer of godhood and remaining human. More than that, the Son becomes the object of his implicitly self-referential speech: behold the man. Christ's emphasis on the glory of hard-won virtue (the splendor of regulating human "Passions, Desires, and Fears" [*PR*, II.467]) casts doubt on any suggestion that such a human being might already be in essence divine—even partially

so, or latently so, or amnesiacally so. The speech has more in common with Biddle's contrasting insistence that the human Jesus, worthy of the godhood bestowed on him at the Resurrection, declined to take God's form out of season. Declining power for now, the Son merits the power later awarded him.

An unseasonable demonstration of power is, of course, what Satan tries to provoke in the final temptation of *Paradise Regain'd*. Perhaps the best thing that can be said of the rich continuities between Biddle's Socinian thought and Milton's pinnacle sequence is that they do not explain away the indeterminacy of Christ's standing. Biddle sees a close correspondence between the pinnacle and the cross. According to his Socinian view, the Son's experience on the cross was itself a temptation, the man having to master the desire to presume to be the god-man. Milton's presumptuous Satan tries to stimulate this same desire in the Son. Yearning, as we have seen, to isolate what in Christ is "more [. . .] then man" (*PR*, IV.538), the tempter tries to prove his divinity: to draw out the *god* from the *god-man*. He settles on taking his charge to the top of "the highest Pinacle" of the Jerusalem temple (*PR*, IV.549), believing that the Son in his humanity will necessarily fall. If Christ is only a man he will plummet and die. If truly more than man, Christ will be miraculously rescued by the angels of whom Scripture speaks. Once at the height of the temple, the tempter voices his command: "Now shew thy Progeny" (*PR*, IV.554). He beckons the Son to grasp the power promised him, and then he releases him. A justifiably vast critical literature has grown out of the Son's remarkably dense response: "Tempt not the Lord thy God, he said and stood" (*PR*, IV.561). An amazed Satan—another reversed expectation—is the one to fall. Angels

arrive to receive Christ "from his uneasie station" (*PR*, IV.584) and to hymn his victory. The Son at last returns to his mother's house.

Two divergent interpretations of the hero's standing are assiduously advanced, and the framework of Socinian futurity allows them both, I think, to remain in play. First, assume with many readers that the Son persists on the pinnacle by event of miracle. To deploy Biddle's terms: the form of the Son and that of the Father coincide for a moment; it is as if God himself were speaking and standing above the temple. On this reading of the sequence, in fact, the Son's act of standing belatedly becomes his first miracle, and Milton its first chronicler. If so, the pinnacle is temporally oriented to the cross, temptation indexed to Passion, but with a notable difference. Above the temple the patient Son is the conduit of divine potency.[90] Speech sliding into speech-act, the Son obeys by repeating God's command, and he performs God's power. The Son's obedient human reason and the Father's divine nature coincide or intersect in time. But later on, as Biddle unfolds the story, the Son will have to resist the temptation to repeat this performance on his own terms. Here, on the spire, sensitivity to the Father's timing enables a divine event. But there, on the cross, such sensitivity will require the Son to suffer in humiliation, to stand by means only of nails. This interpretation sees in the pinnacle, then, the climax of one education and the beginning of another. Christ has learned to master himself, and at the height of his testing he proceeds from acts of patient refusal to a provisional act of divine power. The man has learned that God can, when the time is right, make of him a god-man. But from this point forward the

[90] Carey acknowledges, accurately if begrudgingly, that "it could be argued that if a miracle does occur it is not Christ but God who performs it." *Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. Carey, 517.

Son must be tutored in a more austere responsiveness. He must become the kind of man who can choose to leave the god-man by.

In a second approach, assume that, as other critics maintain, the Son stands on the pinnacle exclusively through human effort.[91] Neither Father nor Son capitulates by providing a version of the miraculous proof the tempter seeks. No miracle occurs. One might find fresh support for such a position in Joanna Picciotto's evocative recent claim that Christ's desert temptation is analogous to the "temptation of the third person" that must be faced by Milton's readers: the desire to yield to some special external authority the labor that should rather be taken up by a truly reformed public.[92] To look for a miracle is then to sidestep the burden of collective human responsibility. On this second broad line of interpretation, the Son vanquishes his foe by standing as a skilled man, as *nothing* "more [. . .] then man," and this achievement baffles the tempter because it was unfathomable to him. The variable that was discounted as null reasserts itself. The Son stands, whereas Adam fell, in nothing more than his humanity. Satan is blind to this (as it were) negative capability, his judgment terminally inextricable from his need for a superhuman show.[93] The pinnacle temptation, if so, consorts with Biddle's vision of the Passion even more directly. As on Jerusalem's spire, so too on Calvary's cross, the hero stifles Satan in human power alone. The conclusion would seem to be that the power inherent in God's divine nature, which elsewhere miraculously intersects with the Son's nature, does not turn up in these two cases. And yet—

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[91] Carey, to take the most influential example, reads Milton's phrase "uneasie station" (*PR*, IV.584) as telling "decisively against the theory that any miracle occurs." *Complete Shorter Poems*, 517.
[92] Joanna Picciotto, *Labors of Innocence in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2010), 496.
[93] Note Milton's epigram in the *De Doctrina Christiana*: "They are blessed who believe without miracles" (*YP*, 6:565).

to anticipate my later claims about how Milton's poem gets reimagined in an eighteenth-century framework—one might propose a more sweeping version of the no-miracle thesis. Namely, the Son's iteration of the Father's commandment ("Tempt not the Lord thy God") blurs any distinction between the power of the divine nature and the utmost of human reasoning. Doubtless this statement takes us a bit beyond Biddle's metaphysics, and it may expand the possibilities of coincident forms beyond what Milton himself could accept. But I'm speculating that if the full authority of the Father's commandment attests to the presence of a divine nature, and moreover if the Son's obedient yet free choosing exemplifies the perfection of a rational human soul, then these two forms might be said to overlap so precisely on the pinnacle that we can't see the difference between them. Nevertheless no miracle, strictly speaking, takes place. Rather than draw divinity down to the realm of human action via miracle, this alternative would emphasize that a patient human actor—for Milton the perfect human—rises up to divinity. Either way one might wish to make this second general approach (the reading against miracles), the poem ends with Milton's hero having learned what he will later need to know on the cross. As the final lines deposit him on the ground of his imminent ministry, the brief epic looks ahead to that sacrifice, his resurrection, and the future development and collective sharing of his teachings.

Reading Milton in tandem with Biddle can support both possibilities. The Socinian context does not deactivate the vibrant indeterminacy that still charges scholarly debates about the pinnacle sequence. But questions about Christ's fixed nature do seem deflated by the end of the brief epic. Biddle's elaboration of the Son's two forms supports a sense that the final victory is, however we read it, more ethical than metaphysical. Desiring to extricate

the human Christ of Scripture from the vagaries of scholastic and Puritan metaphysics, Biddle theorizes a divine form that is activated (and coincides with the Son's natural human form) only in events of miracle. Even so, Biddle insists that such performances of power attest above all to the Son's meritorious choice to be what he is: subordinate to the Father. The Socinian Son cuts the figure of a decidedly anti-Promethean hero in this respect, patiently refusing to steal the fire that he will later be given as a gift. Although Biddle sketches a metaphysics of miracle, he subsumes this possibility within an ethics of human obedience. Similarly valorizing obedient action, Milton's brief epic reaches its climax by tracking where the *while*s of virtue may lead. Satan's wiles, we know, find their response in Christ's patient and self-mastered waiting. "There stand," Satan finally demands atop the pinnacle, "if thou wilt stand; to stand upright | Will ask thee skill." A bit later, he reminds the Son of the Father's scriptural promise: "it is written, He will give command | Concerning thee to his Angels" (*PR*, IV.551-52, 556-57). No "will" or "wilt" takes a metrical stress in these utterances of Satan's, all such syllables being tucked between emphatic pronouns and verbs. But if the tempter prioritizes identity and demonstration over choice, Milton draws a Son who wills the work of patience into positive action. Either as a miraculous god-man for the moment or as the natural man he will remain until raised from the dead, he stands.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has marked out a transfer from one order of indeterminacy to another. In the *De Doctrina Christiana* Milton admits ambivalence about the modality of god-man's union: "we do not know," he says, "how it is so" (*YP*, 6:424). At the pinnacle of *Paradise*

Regain'd, we readers know that Christ stands, but we do not know how it is so. Yet this second instance of ambiguity doesn't simply replicate the first. In the theological treatise Milton conceives of the possible union or coincidence of Christ's two forms as a completed act and situates it in an unsearchable past, the moment when the preexistent Son entered earthly life. The author can know no more, his discussion having arrived at the end of metaphysical theory. But Milton's depiction of an at least functionally Socinian Son—a man by nature, the Word by education, potentially a god-man by miracle—has reached a new beginning of ethical practice. Advancing from the first order of uncertainty to the second involves a change in temporal orientation, and the measure of the advance is the span of Milton's revaluation of Socinianism. Against the retrospective tendency of critics to use the Son who preexists in the *De Doctrina* as a static interpretive key, Milton's late poem adopts the futural orientation that I have associated with the reviled John Biddle. The work looks ahead to Christ's ministry and the new order of human possibility established by his resurrection.

Milton's angels trouble this summary, though. Their final song, like Walter Benjamin's angel of history, looks backward as well as forward. After the Son succeeds on the pinnacle, the angels laud their hero, who according to them "didst debel" Satan long before, and they say the Son reflects God's image whether in a heavenly past ("in the bosom of bliss") or an earthly present ("enshrin'd | In fleshly Tabernacle, and human form") (*PR*, IV.605, 597, 598-99). This backward glance to the Son's preexistence tells against the forward progress I've been stressing. The angels summon, as John Rogers has argued, the memory of *Paradise Lost*. For Rogers this passage is meant to lift readers from a Socinian to

an Arian Christology.[94] Likewise for Abraham Stoll, the angelic song "hurriedly turns the poem against Socinianism."[95] I would say rather that the angels imply what Milton, arguing for a broad Protestant toleration, advocates in *Of True Religion*: the compatibility of Arianism with Socinianism. Milton has his angels try for one last hyphen, one that combines retrospection with forward movement in a merger between Christ's heavenly preexistence, correlated with Arian metaphysical speculation, and the Son's fully human life and his future-directedness, correlated by contrast with Socinian ethical practice. It is this hyphen that (to recall Stoll's argument) appears difficult to sustain. The angels' perhaps impossible synthesis doesn't get the last word, in any case, nor does it appear to preoccupy Milton's hero himself, who walks away from the lofty spire and ahead to the ongoing mediations of his mother and his religion. It ends up taking an Arianism reoriented to the Son's earthly future, not his otherworldly past, to correspond with a Socinian point of view.

Milton's angels briefly try to retrofit *Paradise Regain'd* into the shape of a sequel, though the work remains more urgent as a reimagining or rebooting. One implication of my case is that much recent Milton criticism forces *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regain'd* to be too tidily compatible. Scholars have forgotten an old contention of Tillyard's that sounds extreme but still wields force: "*Paradise Regained* then does not continue the existence of *Paradise Lost*, which is complete and final, admitting no extension. It is rather a colony, linked by first tradition to its mother-city, but autonomous and with a character entirely its own. It should stand alone, untwinned with any other creature of the poet's brain and perhaps the

[94] Rogers, "*Paradise Regained* and the Memory of *Paradise Lost*," 610-11.
[95] Stoll, *Milton and Monotheism*, 233.

most fairly proportioned of them all."[96] As I will claim in the chapters to come, Tillyard's dichotomy speaks to the future that awaited blank verse associated with Milton and the futures that were theorized in such verse in the eighteenth century. If *Paradise Lost* is seen to stand complete and *Paradise Regain'd* to represent an autonomous outgrowth, then later writers who wish (most often for polemical reasons) to take up Miltonic poetry needn't start from the end of the brief epic, from the human Son on the ground. Instead they can rewrite the brief epic as though afresh, creating further new offshoots from *Paradise Lost*. To see the brief epic as more a rebooting than a sequel, in other words, is to allow for a fresh history of Restoration and early-eighteenth-century poetry in which writers consistently appropriate and reimagine *Paradise Lost* and in effect rewrite *Paradise Regain'd*.

The Whig poets analyzed below disown Milton's materialist temporality as they try to coax the earlier epic toward dualist orthodoxy. But such conservative impulses shouldn't be dismissed as merely conventional, for the resulting works found new ways both to amplify the powers of the human soul, which was thought to need defending, and to develop the connection this chapter has introduced between the provisional experience of a future state and the ascent to higher orders of being. Milton's brief epic opens itself to the future by linking the achievement of the Son's obedience with his eventual resurrection and crowning along with further rise, as well, a general resurrection and a world remade. From the perspective of the present, this end remains distant and calls for a patient disposition as the living and the dead alike await a material coincidence of divine and human natures (God "all in all"). Patience for Milton counts once more as work. Nevertheless, the end of his poem

[96] E.M.W. Tillyard, *Milton*, rev. ed. (New York: Collier, 1967), 255.

keeps open the Son's earthbound present and therefore, when looked at from a different perspective, keeps imminent the possibility that the Son's human form may achieve identity with the divine one. The Son might become a god-man again any time now. That an inspired human being (and not just the Son) can wield divine power becomes a refrain in later English verse that styles itself as Miltonic, poetry that constructs new Whig colonies linked to the mother-poem *Paradise Lost* by a reinvented tradition. In contributing to the task of reinvention, the Whig poets to whom I now return separate potentially divine souls from present-tense bodies for the sake of capacities and resources available, as they saw it, only beyond the realm of matter. They detach Milton's verse from his materialism, his style from his substance, and they propel evolving souls into the space of the future.

Chapter Two: Rowe, Angels, and Acceleration

My previous chapter coordinated the futural orientation of Milton's *Paradise Regain'd* with a Socinian emphasis on resurrection. The brief epic ends with a human hero on the ground and signals a commitment, I argued, to patience and ongoing communal work until the culmination of worldly time.[1] The angel Raphael advises similar perseverance when, talking with Adam in *Paradise Lost*, he speculates about how human beings might evolve: "from these corporeal nutriments perhaps | Your bodies may at last turn all to spirit, | Improved by tract of time."[2] One might take Raphael to adumbrate a diffuse vitalist dream. Lively matter pushes incessantly forward, and time itself proves inextricable from the material forces that may modify human beings until they partake at last of God's own perfect refinement. Time is the canal in and through which matter's sublimation occurs. Alternatively, one might opt to filter Raphael's lines through his narrower angelic point of view. As John Rumrich points out, the didactic seraph "does not and cannot respond very well to specifically human concerns,"[3] and his foretelling comes tinged with an inescapable self-regard. Perhaps you humans, the angel seems to say, will be lucky enough to end up just like us. No doubt this conceit of converting the other (humankind) to the same (angelkind) would carry a certain appeal for the emissary from heaven. Having been only apparently

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[1] Joanna Picciotto, *Labors of Innocence in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2010), 493-98, styles Milton's poem as an experimentalist effort to construct a reformed public. "Like any experimentalist," she concludes, "Milton was participating in a process whose completion he would not live to see" (498).

[2] John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 1998), V.496-98; hereafter abbreviated *PL* with citations appearing in the text by book and line.

[3] John P. Rumrich, *Milton Unbound: Controversy and Reinterpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), 17.

superseded, Raphael's story, the story of heavenly angels, could resume its place at the center of a universal history. Even so, it will take a long time for all our bodies to turn to spirit. The angelic future possibly imagined for human beings stays remote in *Paradise Lost* thanks to this aggregate framing. Whether Raphael gestures toward a vitalist apocalypse or hypothesizes about a case-specific status upgrade, then, he encourages the same Adamic disposition. Improving humans should be patient for a collective change to come.

Elizabeth Singer Rowe for one would not agree to wait. Critics have traditionally depicted Rowe, a Nonconformist devotional writer from the West County provinces, in ways that isolate her piety from the possibility of worldly intervention. But recent scholarship has begun to reveal the breadth of her contribution to a Whig agenda at the turn of the eighteenth century, whose proponents used zealous Protestant language to call for social reform and to castigate the decadence they saw as flowing from the Restoration Stuart court to a libertinism that pervaded English cultural life.[4] Among the first writers to refit Milton's legacy for this program, Rowe also filters the poet of *Paradise Lost* through the angelic perspective I have characterized as Raphael's. She seizes upon the thesis that humans will reach an angelic condition, but she modifies it by spurning both its phylogeny and its

[4] On the older portrait of Rowe see Marlene R. Hansen, "The Pious Mrs Rowe," *English Studies* 76 (1995): 34-51. On Rowe and Whig identity see Sharon Achinstein, "'Pleasure by Description': Elizabeth Singer Rowe's Enlightened Milton," in *Milton and the Grounds of Contention*, ed. Mark R. Kelley, Michael Lieb, and John T. Shawcross (Pittsburgh: Duquesne Univ. Press, 2003), 64-87; Sarah Prescott, "Elizabeth Singer Rowe: Gender, Dissent, and Whig Poetics," in *"Cultures of Whiggism": New Essays on English Literature and Culture in the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. David Womersley, with Paddy Bullard and Abigail Williams (Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press, 2005), 173-99; and Peter Walmsley, "Whigs in Heaven: Elizabeth Rowe's *Friendship in Death*," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 44 (2011): 315-30. On the religious propaganda of William's regime see Tony Claydon, *William III and the Godly Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996); and Craig Rose, *England in the 1690s: Revolution, Religion and War* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 195-209. Claydon's emphasis on confessionalism is questioned by Steve Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2009), 307-8.

gradualism. In this chapter I will examine the resulting vision of evolution in the context of the author's anti-libertinism. When pitting new devotional verse against the established forms of libertines such as Rochester, Rowe theorizes the difference between the two in terms of the soul's ability to escape bodily structures of the present. But Rowe's own verse had to change to account for this enthusiastic formulation of change. In her early works the poet sings the soul's confinement; although death is devoutly to be wished, the release it brings demands a repudiation of present structures, including those of poetry itself. Her later works, however, reimagine poetic practice as a means of accessing a heavenly future here and now. The immortal soul's liberty both furnishes a basis for new reformed poetry and supersedes the devotional poet's current marginalization. Pivotal for this development is the anthology titled *A Collection of Divine Hymns and Poems*, which I will argue Rowe played an active if hidden role in producing. Considering the feminist potential of the poet's anti-libertine stance, I will also contend that Rowe rejects the equation, often left unexamined by recent criticism, of literary agency with the writerly body; and that for her the portrayal of women poets as disembodied souls, a representation often presumed to diminish their agency in the world, actually mounted a forceful critique of masculinist norms. It is in this sense that an unlikely radicalism, an urging of comprehensive change, pulses through Rowe's strenuously pious writings. Rowe casts poetic practice as spiritual practice, inauguration into an all-spiritual condition, but anxieties accompany this push toward the life of angels. Even as she rebukes the libertine for his present-minded credo, her own poetry stretches into an altered future in order to clutch that future for the now.

The first of Rowe's two refinements of Raphael's vision, as I've said, is to posit an "all to spirit" future not for the species but for each human being. To this end Rowe stresses the orthodox doctrine of the intermediate state, according to which the soul or mind (she uses the two words interchangeably) continues its conscious life apart from the dead body and receives provisional rewards or punishments before the resurrection and last judgment. Preoccupied by the limits of embodiment, Rowe's work contributes to an orthodox attempt to conflate materialist philosophy with libertine manners, atheism, and irreligion. To buttress God and the soul against these rising threats, writers such as Richard Bentley and John Norris found security in the Cartesian argument that bare matter cannot think.[5] The doctrine of the intermediate state did its part by depicting the soul's independence from the realm of colliding atoms and eroticized bodies, and also by promising the nearness of divine justice. As I discussed in my introductory chapter, orthodox theorists correlated felt temporal proximity with psychological impact, reasoning that only rewards or punishments expected to be imminent (only guards, as it were, thought to be just around the corner) could have any strong effect on everyday behavior. This orthodox line of reflection described the intermediate state as promoting a reassuring sense of social stability.

In the supposed proximity of a disembodied future, Rowe finds other gratifications. On her strongly revisionist view, entering that phase means advancing to an angelic ontological condition. The poet reinterprets the intermediate state, that is, by construing the

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[5] See Ann Thomson's survey in *Bodies of Thought: Science, Religion, and the Soul in the Early Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008), 44-61. Descartes most succinctly brackets thinking substance from extended substance in the *Principles of Philosophy*: see *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985), 1:211. Bentley defines the soul as a substance "essentially distinct" from the body in *Matter and Motion Cannot Think* (London: T. Parkhurst and H. Mortlock, 1692), 13; see also Kristine Louise Haugen, *Richard Bentley: Poetry and Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2011), 101-105.

release of the human soul as an evolutionary rupture. Despite her commitment to the orthodox cause, from an early stage Rowe disregards stable hierarchies of creation according to which angels are always higher than humans. She also tends to deemphasize the resurrection and its elaboration of a shared and ultimately corporeal afterlife. Assuming an angel-centric viewpoint instead, she wants to insist that a faithful human, in detaching from its corrupt body, turns "all to spirit," reaches a higher plane of being, and acquires new freedom and facility. Here is Raphael's theory of ascent, personalized. Presently lacking powers whose closeness she can nonetheless discern, Rowe attributes her confidence in the individual soul to the angelic state that she thinks expects it. This pattern also supplies her with a way to think about aesthetic engagement. In a representative ode, the author defines beauty as a function of the "ecstacies sublime" that inflame a "ravish'd soul" when "far from the sensual crowd retir'd."[6] Inaccessible in playhouses or polite conversation, true beauty comes over the mind when apart from the throng and hints at the exalted delights it will meet when apart from the body. Rowe thus establishes the soul's detachability as a conceptual precondition for sublimity, recruiting the latter term's still operative spatial associations for the idea that she will rise to a wholly spiritual state.[7] Although experiences of the sublime can accordingly bring out the soul's current frustration, at their best they can evoke the future craved by the solitary perceiver: when her modes of sensation and

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[6] *The Miscellaneous Works in Prose and Verse of Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe*, 2 vols. (London: R. Hett and R. Dodsley, 1739), 1:103. Further citations of this posthumous edition are abbreviated *MW* and appear parenthetically by volume and page.

[7] This formulation is meant to be more exacting than Abigail Williams's claim about Whig poets such as Blackmore, Dennis, and Rowe: "In the physico-theological verse of the early eighteenth century the sublime was embodied in a rhetoric of transcendent flight which linked divine providence to scientific and poetic aspiration." *Poetry and the Creation of a Whig Literary Culture 1681-1714* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2005), 189.

cognition will be dramatically expanded,[8] when she will fly toward the divine source and sum of all beauty, and when, removed altogether from the "sensual crowd," her mind will be her self. Rowe expedites the process of evolution by individualizing it (her soul won't have to wait on any other bodies); while beauty by sometimes conjuring such a future makes it feel even nearer.

Like Rowe's angelism, though, her aesthetic sensibility is appetitive and expansive, and the poet longs to draw an "all to spirit" state closer still and to raid its resources. In a second modification of Raphael's proposal, therefore, she tries to arrogate an angelic future and its possibilities for present-day practice. Margaret Anne Doody has aptly characterized the style of this era's poetry as that of "buccaneering millionaires"; for Rowe, an unlikely pirate to be sure, acquisitive energies spur raids on an angelic afterlife.[9] This endeavor, as I will argue, intertwines a self-consciously literary devotion with Whig cultural politics. Both Rowe and her friend and fellow Nonconformist Isaac Watts indicate that the soul upon entering the intermediate state undergoes a changed relation to time. The more cautious of the two writers, Watts observes that disembodied spirits have "no such Relation to *Place* as Bodies have": strictly speaking, they don't exist anywhere in particular. Because these beings cannot then organize intervals as we do, with reference to stable heavenly bodies, Watts

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[8] Contemporaries such as George Berkeley were likewise speculating that the soul in the intermediate state gains broadened powers of perception and cognition. See the letter to S. Johnson (25 November 1729) in George Berkeley, *Philosophical Works, Including the Works on Vision*, ed. Michael R. Ayers (London: Everyman, 1996), 422-26, esp. 425; "The Future State," *Guardian* 27 (11 April 1713), in *The Works of George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne*, ed. A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop, 9 vols. (London: Thomas Nelson, 1948-57), 7:181-84; and Marc A. Hight, "Berkeley and Bodily Resurrection," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 45 (2007): 443-58, at 455-56.

[9] In this verse, the critic evocatively writes, "unknown and disparate wealth is sought and gathered, fastidiously but greedily, and brought home for use." Margaret Anne Doody, *The Daring Muse: Augustan Poetry Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985), 18, 17.

concludes that until we join them we cannot fathom their temporality. If we try to, he warns, we will likely fall into absurdities by loosely applying to spirits forms of expression that "properly belong only to Bodies."[10] Rowe by contrast grows more and more willing to use the language of familiarity when she relates the soul's separated existence. "When the mind," she avows in a 1717 letter, "is in a situation superior to the changing scenes below the sun in pursuit of boundless and immortal bliss, the soul with a noble freedom ascends the celestial heights, in search of its great original, the fountain of its existence, and centre of all its hopes" (*MW,* 2:34). Whereas Watts consigns the soul's new temporality to an unknowable future that commences at death, Rowe professes that contemplation allows her to sense in this life her soul's flight; she implicitly claims to have already experimented with a different orientation to time. By this point in her career, enthusiastic transport has become a mode of time travel, the faithful soul's ability to leap for a spell into its coming angelic freedom.

When Rowe represents such excursions and when she considers their possible aftereffects, she focuses on verse. Her letters almost always use interpolated poetry to depict the flight of the soul. Immediately after the declaration just quoted, for example, she sets apart an illustrative couplet: "*All other joys are visionary bliss, | But here is all substantial ecstacy*." Rather than being spoken by the letter writer, the lines appear to be enunciated by the heaven-ranging soul and pronounced from a future that outstrips all the comparatively illusory amusements (including the writing of letters) that could only gesture toward it. Poetry, here visually detached from the surrounding text, serves as the language of angels and stages the soul's first-hand experience of an angelic condition. It leaps from the local to

[10] Watts, *Philosophical Essays*, 161, 379, 164.

the airy. The result therefore intensifies rather than resolves the question of what distinguishes "visionary bliss" from "substantial ecstacy." Evidently sensitive to the ambiguity, Rowe returns to the prosaic voice of the present, following the couplet with a remarkable admission:

> But were these gay speculations a delusion, let me be thus deceiv'd, till death shall end the pleasing dream. Were the Christian heaven as great a fable as the poets *Elysium*, 'tis a fable so well contriv'd, that I would not exchange it for the gloomy scheme of the most sagacious free-thinker: rather let me indulge the charming delusion, and entertain myself with the transporting fiction, till that and my existence meet their final period. (*MW*, 2:34)

Prior to this qualification, heavenly poetry's power seems representational. Although tension persists between her identity as a published author and her self-understanding as an angel-to-be, in the letter Rowe shifts to verse to actualize in writing a future to which she presumes extrasensory access. Yet the turn brings with it a shadow of "delusion": what if instead of portraying her encounter with a heavenly state, the couplet only attests to wish fulfillment, her flights of mind made to fit a "fable" she knows she adores? Rowe admits the possibility and responds by prioritizing the pleasures of the imagination over such apparently competing criteria as verifiability, authority, and tradition. Enthusiastic voyages no longer granted an independent existence, the author now writes as though from the position of a reader. She sticks with the notion of the soul's detachability because she delights in the heavenly poetry it makes possible. Foremost among the imaginative appeals it conveys is the potential that, as I've been suggesting, Rowe covets: a reachable transformation. Indeed, to

cease grasping at an "all to spirit" future—no matter whether felt or contrived—would for her mean abandoning hope in the release of difference from repetition, of newness from sameness. It would mean yielding to a "gloomy" if "sagacious" alternative that she characterizes as a futureless stance.

Pleasure found in virtual, and possibly delusional, visions of change can itself effect change. Even an altered future that's forged, in other words, can be plundered for the sake of the present. In her letter Rowe differentiates her own position from the scheme of the freethinker, whom she tends to group with the libertine (and by implication, I will speculate, the Socinian). Now it's fairly well documented that Rowe joins other Whig writers in calling for a moralistic poetic reform whose benefits they say will extend to English society as a whole.[11] She thereby participates in a "complex rejection of Restoration libertine culture" around the turn of the eighteenth century.[12] What I wish to bring out is how the detachability trope, with which Rowe justifies a commitment to literary production, also clarifies her project's designs on literary culture. Judging the latter to be dominated by libertines and freethinkers who promulgate a materialist outlook that she associates with fixity and captivity, Rowe means to countermand their stifled literature, its excess of bodies

[11] Sarah Prescott has confirmed that Rowe shared the reformist agenda of such Whig authors as Blackmore, Dennis, and Watts. Seeking to institute a modern poetry both biblical and nationalist, these writers pronounced that (as Prescott sums up) "biblical verse was to be the saving of the nation and it was the duty of the nation's poets to participate in this national reformation." "Gender, Dissent, and Whig Poetics," 188.

[12] Jennifer Richards, introduction to *Elizabeth Singer [Rowe]*, ed. Robert C. Evans, The Early Modern Englishwoman: A Facsimile Library of Essential Works (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), xiii. Further citations of this book, which includes a reproduction of Rowe's pseudonymous *Poems on Several Occasions* (London: J. Dunton, 1696), will appear parenthetically by page with the siglum *ESR*.

perpetuating only sameness, with new verse of the freed spirit.[13] As she labors to integrate divine poetry, separability, and evolution, her imaginings become interventions. If the faithful soul cannot in this social respect break free, she suggests, England will never have done with the abject bodies playfully aestheticized by and associated with Rochester and the wits of Charles II's court. To put my chapter's case summarily: the verse I'll be examining tries to contain this bodily threat by tapping into a future in which it's already been contained. Initially Rowe associates captivity with her own divine poetry, understood as a form of lament. But by coming to project that captivity onto her libertine opponents instead, she develops in song a virtually modified future that she hopes may in turn engineer a different present. She scripts released souls as Miltonic angels in a bid to upend, or rather convert, Rochester. The bodies she effaces necessarily reassert themselves, however, imposing a limit that Rowe in turn incorporates into her poetic project.

SINGING THE SOUL'S BONDAGE

In this section I will contend that Rowe projects a confinement that is initially established as the poet's own onto the figure of the libertine and the philosophy he advocates. She recasts the libertine's self-styled freedom as captivity and her own seeming captivity as the basis of true freedom. This reversal carries others with it, all of them keyed to the opposition that Rowe fosters between inertia and change, and it eventuates in her

[13] Rowe's approach invites comparison to Henri Bergson's much later distinction between matter on one hand, which "repeats the past unceasingly, because, subject to necessity, it unfolds a series of moments of which each is the equivalent of the preceding moment and may be deduced from it"; and spirit on the other, "which is not only undetermined, but also reasonable and reflective." *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 223, 221.

poetry's confident entry into a heavenly future, from which the devotional poet wants new literary norms as well as reformed social manners to be gleaned.

(a) The Devotional Poet in *Poems on Several Occasions*

The early verse sets dualistic terms for her frustration. In the pseudonymous *Poems on Several Occasions* (1696)—a collection which gathers and augments the contributions that a youthful Rowe, writing most often as "the Pindarick Lady," made to John Dunton's *Athenian Gazette: or Casuistical Mercury*—the earthly body pervasively names restriction for the soul while disembodiment promises hope for newness realized as movement.[14] Agency is reckoned here as detachability: the liberty the mind feels as its due, its essential independence from the frame to which it seems forcibly but only contingently strapped. Songs of bondage issue from this state of affairs. The singer, as in an ode titled "The Expostulation," ponders the thwarting of the soul, and the soul's resulting complaint supplies both the element of verse and its content:

> How long shall these *uneasy chains* controul
> The willing flights of my impatient Soul?
> How long shall her *most pure intelligence*

[14] Dunton founded the Athenian Society in 1691, and the resulting periodical was the first venue to publish poems by Rowe as well as by Swift. See Gilbert McEwen, *The Oracle of the Coffee House: John Dunton's "Athenian Mercury"* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1972); Helen M. Berry, *Gender, Society, and Print Culture in Late Stuart England: The Cultural World of the "Athenian Mercury"* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003); and the more speculative treatment by Picciotto, *Labors of Innocence*, 307-20. For a view opposed to McEwan's contention that Rowe was "no innovator in verse" (109), see Paula Backscheider, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and Their Poetry: Inventing Agency, Inventing Genre* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2005), 113-22.

Be strain'd through an infectious screen of gross, corrupted sence? (*ESR*, 12-13)

Chains fix an otherwise mobile spirit to the body, the intellect being strained (the internal rhyme interposes a new metaphor) as through a rotten filter. "Strain'd" also nods at the labor required for the soul to operate under conditions that block its propensities. It chafes under the awareness of how much more it could do were it free. Meanwhile, the profuseness of matter, hard to contain though itself containing, gives rise to the manic and ostensibly Pindaric flourish that closes the stanza. The words agglomerate, raising the tonal pitch and visually extending the material "screen" under consideration, and perhaps this tendency toward "infectious" expansiveness incites the touch of jealousy that stirs beneath the disdain expressed on behalf of the soul.

Reflection on the soul's restrained faculties prompts Rowe to dream of a time when they may be exercised to the full. She thus orients her desire toward the silencing of complaint. In "The Rapture" a "*vex'd* Soul" is burdened "*beneath its* load *of* Flesh," and the speaker contemplates "*bless*[ing]" the hand that "w*ou'd break her* hated Chain" (*ESR*, 36). The poet oscillates from images of heavy-laden sinking—now the soul implicitly resembles an exhausted Atlas—to images of force held precariously in check—now the soul pulls its chain taut with upward urging. Rowe's "Paraphrase on John 21.17" likewise nurses the hope of flight from corporeal bondage to the openness of heaven. In fact the liminal moment of rupture, at which atrophied wings extend anew, carries more appeal than any destination implied for the voyager:

I Love thee so, I'de kiss the Dart should free

My *flutterring Soul*, and send her up to thee;

O would'st thou break her Chain, with what delight

She'd spread her Wings, and bid the world goodnight. (*ESR*, 12')[15]

At this stage, Rowe's divine verse might be said to adopt an idiom of critique that longs for its own obsolescence.[16] The voice of the soul has begun to coincide with the voice of the poet: proud but vexed, highborn but temporarily diminished, imprisoned but soon (so she believes) to recover a rightful liberty. Indeed, though Rowe would cringe at the claim, the embodied souls given voice in her early verse sound remarkably like the hellbound fallen angels in *Paradise Lost*. Both are trapped in structures that belie what they know as their bright dignity: "oh how fallen!" (*PL*, 1.84). In the "Paraphrase" quoted above, even the manifest distinction between the "I" and the fluttering soul works mostly to mark a boundary between the present and the possible, and to show how much the speaker will do to cross over. Willingly would she, in order to be her soul in flight, square off with death, which not for the first time comes armed with a dart. Rowe's speaker wants then to assume a boundary position like the one Satan reaches at the gates of hell. But that confrontation from *Paradise Lost* is now reimagined as the end of imprisonment in the body, with the poet presupposing Christ's victory for her soul. Since death will defeat only the frame despised by the speaker, her true self will escape both victorious and (unlike Satan, who carries his confinement with him as he goes) unfettered. On this scheme the soul triumphs, it seems

[15] The pagination of *Poems on Several Occasions* starts anew at sig. Aa1r; numbered pages in *ESR* that appear after the break I will therefore cite this way.

[16] Think of an agenda-defined feminism, for example, that wishes to win irrelevance someday by accomplishing all its goals and to walk away in freedom. I have in mind the distinction explored by Elizabeth Grosz between such an approach and a contrasting "feminism without end, without definitive goal, without pregiven aims or objects." See *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2005), 171-183.

clear, by emerging as a different kind of angel, free to range heavenward as she will. In effect, Rowe's devotional vision evacuates earth. Hell extends all the way through life suffered in the stifling body; heaven extends to the other cusp of corporeality; and there is no room, no time, in between. Rowe's vision moreover makes captivity the necessary condition of religious verse and makes religious verse a literary formation of hell. Complaint occasioned by bondage epitomizes such poetry, a provisional help whose own gross passages or screens ("strains") and forms won't however, it is to be hoped, always be necessary. If the soul makes good on its aspirations, after all, it will have the use of new music not inspired by chains, music to which fleshly ears aren't attuned. As formulated in Rowe's *Poems*, divine verse, lacking a freed future of its own, relishes the prospect of bidding itself goodnight.

The confined soul, which I have likened to a fallen angel manacled in hell, will at that pivotal moment attain the powers of a heavenly angel. Rowe draws the principal difference between the two beings as a difference in capacity for movement. But because the experience of heavenly freedom is for now, as in Watts's cautious estimation, unknowable, *Poems* depicts it in subjunctive terms. Only rarely, and then briefly, does the writer enter into the modified perspective of the departed.[17] Trapped souls in the collection meanwhile serve as types of the poet, rattling their shackles rhythmically and performing songs of unjust confinement and thwarted glory. Individualized spiritual agency serves as both the goad (it is now frustrated) and the end (it will soon be realized) of poetic complaint.

It's no surprise that the outlook of a relative outsider comes easily to Rowe: a Dissenter whose parents met when her minister father was in prison for his unsanctioned

[17] One elegy, for instance, presumes to specify that the "pure *unfetter*'d *Soul*" of a deceased friend remembers the spot "where she left her *Chain*" (*ESR*, 58').

(probably Presbyterian) religious views,[18] a woman poet who positions herself within a male poetic line and joins up with a predominantly male literary program,[19] and a writer who contrasts the isolation of her native West Country provinces with the overstuffed decadence of the capital.[20] In ways that scholars have only lately begun to assess, Rowe makes a career out of responding strategically to these cultural and sociopolitical limitations. From the outset, however, she worries that her canniness brings false comfort. For there lurks in her poetic art the danger that the soul will grow complacent in its chains, fonder of the singing than of the hope carried in song (hope that, when fulfilled, will indeed silence song). This anxiety may go some way toward explaining why the young Rowe needs to make her divine poems self-dissolving, promising a new condition in which they no longer play a part. Even so, the work of writing them may end up distracting from their express theme: the achievement of angelic freedom. Concern about such incompatibility between poetic production and spiritual exercise not only presents itself in Rowe's earliest works, which a few critics have misguidedly praised as less spirit-obsessed than the creations of the older "epitome of the pious woman writer."[21] It also lingers near her death. According to the

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[18] Henry F. Stecher, *Elizabeth Singer Rowe, the Poetess of Frome* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1973), 23-27.

[19] On Rowe's exceptionality as a woman among Whig poetic reformers, see Prescott, "Gender, Dissent, and Whig Poetics," 179-87.

[20] See Sarah Prescott, "Provincial Networks, Dissenting Connections, and Noble Friends: Elizabeth Singer Rowe and Female Authorship in Early Eighteenth-Century England," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 25 (2001): 29-42, esp. 31-36. Rowe parlays the corresponding prospect of decentralized cultural authority into a ghostly literary persona, penning letters that she earnestly calls "intelligences from another world" (*MW*, 2:34). "I find 'tis a hard thing," Rowe says in beginning another letter, "for people that are quite out of the world, to converse with those that are in it. As I am cut off from the ways of the living, I know not how to entertain my surviving friends. News from the dead, I fancy, would not be very agreeable to many of them" (*MW*, 2:221).

[21] The phrase and the distinction, to which students of John Donne have grown accustomed, come from Jennifer Richards: see *ESR*, x. Richards may be overstating a point made more cautiously by Roger Lonsdale: that "a few" of Rowe's early poems "have a very different tone from the elevated piety usually

account of Rowe in Thomas Birch's *General Dictionary* (1734-41), whose ten thick volumes include entries for only four other women,[22] late in her life her friends decorously commented that her appearance betokened many more years of health. The dictionary entry proceeds with her caustic reply: "*That it was the same as telling a slave, his fetters were like to be lasting; or complimenting him on the strength of the walls of his dungeon*. And the fervour of her wishes to commence the life of Angels irresistibly broke from her lips in numberless other instances."[23] In Rowe's first collection of verse the price of an all-spiritual future, of the mobility enjoyed by God's angels, is similarly high. According to *Poems*, entry into that state demands a complete rejection of structures of the present, including the poetry that impels the soul to look forward by making instruments out of the bodily bonds that hold it in place. Here divine poetry attests, as long as the song lasts, to the poet's own confinement.

(b) The Libertine in *A Collection of Divine Hymns and Poems*

Rowe broadens the temporal possibilities of her verse by introducing the libertine as an oppositional figure. But the book that best exemplifies this change, titled *A Collection of Divine Hymns and Poems* (1704, 1709), has not earned her much credit among literary scholars. Roger Lonsdale, to take just one prominent example, notices that Rowe's name shows up only briefly in the anthology and speculates that "her appearance [. . .] is perhaps to be explained by the fact that the Revd John Bowden, minister to the dissenting community at

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associated with her"; see *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets: An Oxford Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989), 45.

[22] Richard Terry, *Poetry and the Making of the English Literary Past, 1660-1781* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001), 261.

[23] *A General Dictionary, Historical and Critical*, eds. John Peter Bernard, Thomas Birch, and John Lockman, 10 volumes (London: G. Strahan, et al., 1734-41), 8:794, note M.

Frome, was also a contributor."[24] Lapses like this one are understandable, for both versions of the work seem deliberately to obscure the poet's involvement. In the revised edition of 1709, on which I'll be relying, the title page buries her pseudonym Philomela (the stage name that replaced "The Pindarick Lady") sixth in an array of stated contributors, and the compilation itself lists her surname Singer—she didn't marry the aspiring biographer Thomas Rowe until 1710—alongside a mere two contributions.[25] Closer inspection reveals, however, that Rowe is the best-represented writer in the book, as Sarah Prescott remarks in passing.[26] By my own count twenty-two items of verse, most attributed here to either "an Unknown Hand" or "a Young Lady," should be regarded as indisputably hers. All of them resurface in other publications her authorship of which is beyond doubt. It's also quite possible that she wrote the unsigned preface, which bears discernible marks of her diction and phrasing. What's more, external evidence signals that she was responsible for gathering the contributions and coordinating the volume.[27] It seems warrantable then to conjecture that Rowe was directly involved in veiling her own participation. If so, perhaps she was honing as an editor the persona that years later would take numerous fictionalized guises in her most famous book of prose, *Friendship in Death, in Twenty Letters from the Dead to the Living*

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[24] Lonsdale, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*, 45.

[25] See *A Collection of Divine Hymns and Poems on Several Occasions: By the E. of Roscommon, Mr. Dryden, Mr. Dennis, Mr. Norris, Mrs. Kath. Phillips, Philomela, and others* (London: J. Baker, 1709); hereafter abbreviated *DHP* and cited parenthetically by page numbers.

[26] Referring to *DHP*, Prescott remarks that "Rowe's poetry represents the majority of the material printed"; see "Gender, Dissent, and Whig Poetics," 190.

[27] Recurring syntactical and topical similarities emerge from a comparison of the editorial preface of *DHP* with a letters by Rowe (see especially *MW*, 2:17-20) and with her "Pindarick to the Athenian Society" (*ESR*, 15'-18'). More noteworthy still are two items of external evidence. First, an advertisement in the back-matter of the copy of the 1709 edition that I've consulted—held in the Wrenn Library Collection at the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin—describes the book as "[p]ublished by Mrs. Singer"; second, the title page of the fourth edition (London: W. Owen, 1757) announces that the anthology's contents were "collected by the late Mrs. Singer."

(1728): a spirit-writer visible only through textual traces left from the other side. (More ought to be said, by the way, about how for the purposes of epistolary narrative *Friendship in Death* casts lingering spirits as unseen yet embedded first-person speakers.) In any case Rowe's unheralded contributions to *Divine Hymns and Poems*, when read in light of the anthology's interventionist framing, attempt to situate an antagonist within the kind of captivity that binds the poet herself in the earlier *Poems on Several Occasions*. For Rowe the consequence is new access to an all-spiritual future.

Her opponent doesn't take long to make his first appearance in the anthology. The preface, which I've proposed was written by Rowe but which tallies with her other documented opinions even if not, declares that libertines continue to exert a malevolent sway over English letters, "Loose and Impious Authors" having fomented a "Contagion" that, "like a mighty Deluge, threatens to overwhelm us." Playwrights come in for particular scorn. The "Profane and Leud Poetry" of the London stage, traceable ultimately to Whitehall, is deemed more "Fatal to Mens Souls, than [ongoing war is] to their Bodies" (*DHP*, sigs. A4v-A6r). In sounding a warning about this deluge, the preface relies on an analogy had become commonplace among moralists from across the political spectrum; thus James Grantham Turner can begin his exploration of libertine London by quoting the committed Jacobite Jane Barker, who, a few years after the appearance of *Divine Hymns and Poems*, laments the "Deluge of Libertinism which has overflow'd the Age."[28] That difference in tense, though, proves instructive. According to the preface to *Divine Hymns and Poems*, the

[28] Jane Barker, *Exilius, or the Banish'd Roman* (1715); quoted in James Grantham Turner, *Libertines and Radicals in Early Modern London: Sexuality, Politics, and Literary Culture, 1630-1685* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), ix.

destructive tide has not yet inundated the nation, and the writer proceeds to advance a saving alternative. Modern religious verse, typified by the volume in hand and by the work of its dedicatee, the Whig poet Richard Blackmore, is promoted as a means of escape from bodily annihilation, indeed as "a Sort of Wings to the Soul" (*DHP*, sig. A4r). Such poetry can stimulate nothing less than a "Glorious Reformation" (sig. A7r), a phrase that melds support for the Williamite settlement with an assertion of authentic Protestant identity. Perhaps to forestall suspicions about the book's polemic or to broaden its appeal, the writer eventually shifts to a tone of universal morality, claiming that even "my severest Censures (unless more hardned Sinners than Rochester himself) will when Death approaches them alter their Opinion" (sig. A8r). The prefatory text thereby positions itself as acting upon writers and readers, who are said to face a cultural contagion, in the same way that the news of imminent death acts upon sinners. It introduces a final chance to reform. And for proof that at a late hour an offender caught up in vice can still change, it adduces the example of that supposed deathbed convert Rochester.[29] In this case the image of the reformed rake beckons a realizable future with new sexual manners as well as new literary norms: even a libertine can be saved from the damage he himself has wrought. But to escape, the preface suggests, he must rely on a soul with newly extended wings.

The preface begins to adapt dualistic formulations of confinement and movement, familiar from Rowe's devotional verse, to a specific cultural agenda, one that identifies libertinism with the body's limitations and Whig reformism with the soul's freedom. English

[29] The standard resource for eighteenth-century discussions of Rochester's alleged conversion is Gilbert Burnet, *Some Passages of the Life and Death of the Right Honourable John, Earl of Rochester . . . Written by His Own Direction on His Death-bed* (London: R. Chiswel, 1680).

readers and writers are called either to stay within profane structures, fiddling while the deluge rises, or else to detach from them, reaching a changed condition. Rowe's verse in *Divine Hymns and Poems* assumes and develops this associative grid. Rowe demonstrates, that is to say, the pliability of her opposition between the vexing body and the stifled soul. In her earlier writing, devotional poetry attests to the captivity of the poet, who sings while she suffers in the body. In the anthology, on the other hand, such verse heralds release that's available to the poet and her culture alike. Rowe keeps the structural position of agonized confinement occupied; only now, as we will see, she assigns the libertine to it, or rather she takes the libertine to have chosen it. By portraying the most visible figure of literary London in hell, the author reinforces an already implicit link between present-day literary practice and bondage, but she brings her Miltonic imagery into line with her moralistic program. Rowe's contributions to the anthology turn overtly to *Paradise Lost* for some of their metrical bearings and, crucially, for their portraits of spirits confined and spirits free. Descriptions of fallen angels when confined in hell thus seem to reach the front of Rowe's mind. The poet brings to her adaptations the expectation that each soul can quickly attain an angelic state. And she also appears to bring her objections to Rochester's materialism.[30] She includes that outlook—what she sees as its veneration of bodies in perpetuity—among the concepts she clusters around the condemned libertine, all signifying frustration and stasis. Among the heavenly angels of Milton's epic Rowe uncovers contrasting prospects for human change, futures ready for released souls. Thus she reveals one pattern by which her forebear could, in being rebranded as a Whig exemplar, be detached from his own materialism.

[30] See Warren L. Chernaik, *Sexual Freedom in Restoration Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995).

I claimed above that Rowe's spiritual vision tends to divide life between heaven and hell: there is no third. If in *Poems* the author subsumes all of poetic practice under the genre of complaint and locates it by default in captivity, in *Divine Hymns and Poems* she treats poetic culture like a mind able to choose between one place, one future, and the other. Poetry here can find time for heaven before the death of the earthly body. Still, there remain only two choices, both of which are drawn against an angelic past. In "A Dialogue between the Fallen Angels and a Humane Spirit just Entred into the Other World," the first of Rowe's uncredited works in the collection, a soul has escaped its earthly frame but not its misery. "Long struggling in the Agonies of Death," the soul reflects as the poem begins, "with Horror I resign'd my mortal Breath." After being "hurry'd Headlong down the gloomy Steep," the spirit becomes aware of its hopelessness and its existence as "a naked, an unbody'd, Mind." The text begins, then, by establishing a synthesis between the released soul and the speaking persona; unlike in her earlier poetry, Rowe adopts the perspective of this soul as it commences an all-spiritual afterlife. Soon its interlocutors arrive, the eponymous fallen angels. They taunt their pitiable new companion: "But for one happy Snare," the human could have "in the blissful Skies supply'd the Place | Of some fall'n Spirit of our nobler Race" (*DHP*, 67, 68). The apostate angels thus index the human's plight to their own history. Only just failing to replace one of the rebels in heaven, the disembodied human has replicated their descent into hell. Whereas the prevailing orthodox tendency was to hurry along judgment partly because of social anxieties, to posit an imminent reward or punishment in order to shape earthly behavior, Rowe deploys the notion of the intermediate state to pull the soul into an angelic life and an angelic history. Hence the soul falls not after

the model of Adam and Eve but after the precedent plunge of Satan and his legions, depicted by Milton as "hurled headlong" down "to bottomless perdition" (*PL*, I.45-47). Admittedly, the newly arrived spirit differs from the fallen angels, as they declaim with scorn late in Rowe's piece, in that the human rejected the "peculiar" sacrifice of Christ, an offer "too Glorious for the fall'n Angelick Race" (*DHP*, 71). But this contrast only fortifies the controlling insight that the soul lost its opportunity to fly among unfallen angels.

Three such figures conclude "A Pastoral on the Nativity of our Saviour," one of Rowe's rare signed contributions to the anthology, with the proclamation that the Son of God

> cam'st the wretched Life of Man to prove.
> And thus our ruin'd Numbers will supply,
> And fill the Desolations of the Sky. (*DHP*, 42)

These beings propound a logic more strenuously angel-centered than is Raphael's in his speech about human prospects for evolution. As they see it, Christ condescends to earth to replenish a decimated heaven: his salvific role is to equip souls to become the right kind of angels.[31] Not for the last time accentuating the angels' power over God's own, Rowe envisions a pragmatic but seemingly limited Father who needs to rectify a serious recruiting problem. Disobedient humans, adding to the difficulty the Son is sent to resolve, join the ruined apostates, while the obedient are gathered as angelic reinforcements. In the latter case both the commander and the recruits can claim to be enhanced: God fills out his numbers,

[31] The formula, though of course with a different emphasis, calls to mind William Empson's famous allegation that God created humanity to spite Satan. See *Milton's God* (New York: New Directions, 1961), 56, 145.

and the faithful gain new freedom and capacities. The detached soul in the "Dialogue," however, despite reaching the moment of rupture yearned for in Rowe's youthful poems, continues to share in the bondage that characterizes her earlier stifled souls. In fact the despondent spirit ends up incapable even of further descent: "To lower Depths of Woe I cannot fall," it groans (*DHP*, 71).

Rowe's blank-verse "Description of Hell, in Imitation of Mr. Milton," which directly follows the "Dialogue" in *Divine Hymns and Poems*, clinches this continuity between hell and the earthly body, and it returns to the figure of the libertine to integrate the poet's portrayal with her view of literary culture. Damnation for Rowe, it emerges, amounts to a nightmare of inescapable embodiment. If unrepentant, the soul leaves one delimiting prison only to find itself locked into a still more awful one, an afterlife that intensifies the hellishness of life. Lacking even the presumed release of death, souls continue their complaints at a higher pitch. The first of six stanzas begins the poem's downward motion by tracking geographic features ("Deep, to unfathomable Spaces deep"; "the sickly Blaze of Suph'rous Flames"), but then the "Description" turns to auditory elements in order to reach the cries ("long, remediless, Complaints") of five particular souls. In thereby penetrating what the second line calls the "dark, detested, Paths of Hell" to alight on personalized circumstances of despair, Rowe ratifies Milton's tendency to explore place in ways that expose psychology. To apply two words from her previous poem: depths give way to woe. The libertine appears within this group of condemned souls, coming after the atheist with his finally satisfied demands for proof. Resembling the dismal spirit of the "Dialogue," the rake has also missed heaven by falling into one representative (and representatively "fleet") snare. He grieves his decision

to trade "Immortal Transports, and Celestial Feasts, | For the short Pleasure of a sordid Sin." Such forsaken transports no doubt point to the exalted emotions that circulate in heaven—this is a poem whose God smiles at his company—but they also exemplify how Rowe renders sentiment spatially and space sentimentally. As I've suggested, her idea of the sublime depends on associating separability with movement and height. Here the pathos of the libertine, separated but placed permanently low, derives both from his inability to experience sublimity and, in his implied role as a literary figure, from his incapacity to evoke it. Confined to an abject body in life and thereafter, it is now the rake who recalls the defeated rebels in *Paradise Lost*, whether locked on the inside of hell's guarded gate or (as I suspect Rowe would think) laboring in mental chains wherever they go. Rowe's character is comparably immobile, and he fixates on the freedom that he missed achieving and yet that, like the rich man in the parable who espies Abraham and Lazarus, he can still behold: "Too late, all lost, for ever lost, he sees | The envy'd Saints triumphing from afar." No less a libertine than Rochester could discover new life among heaven's angels. Having squandered that chance, the "bleeding Soul" in the "Description" faces the punishment of facing up to the same libertinism forever (*DHP*, 86-88). For refusing to change he is punished with the incapacity to change.

Rowe, as I've been arguing, transmutes her fear that poets may grow complacent in their bonds by transferring those bonds to the libertine. The works considered in this section are consistent in enacting a poetics of claustrophobia. Either the movement allied with change is available only through death, as when Rowe's body-shackled singer pines for the end of her song, or else it is lost to an earlier agency, as when her hellbound soul mourns a

missed opportunity to reform. By modifying the object of confinement, however, Rowe finds a way to rescue poetic practice as such from the danger that it might distract from the task of attaining spiritual freedom. She addresses the problem by circumscribing it within and directing it upon a dominant adversary. Perhaps modern devotional verse can comprehend, not just await, a heavenly angelic future.[32] But libertine poetry, as she reads it, disowns this or any possible future. Rowe does have a point here. It is in fact Rochester's repeated claim, articulated most concisely in "Love and Life," that "the present moment's all my Lott." As Jonathan Kramnick has explained, Rochester's poem "conceiv[es] of persons as present-tense things."[33] Translating just this stance into her own moralistic language, Rowe imagines that the future of the libertine crystallizes the hellish confinement that defines his earthly life. His future, even after the release of his soul, brings no difference: it's no real future at all. And according to the argument of *Divine Hymns and Poems*, the libertine present is also the literary present. Her poems of hell therefore imply a future in which English literary culture, as foreseen in the preface, is completely overrun by libertinism and dominated by vulgar bodies. Rowe doesn't mean that poetry would cease to be produced any more than she thinks that immortal souls will cease to exist. Rather, she intimates that poetry's movement, its capacity to soar otherwise than it is, would be quelled. Writers and readers who forfeit their chance at a "Glorious Reformation" will find themselves locked

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[32] If we add the further proviso that such poetry for Rowe will be of dissenting stripes, then the spatial contrast implicit in her critique becomes clearer. Dissenting writing, though typically (as Abigail Williams shows) "linked to commercial authorship and low culture," can bring the soul high; but the writings of the Tory-inflected and libertine-dominated establishment must bring the soul low. See Williams, *Poetry and the Creation of a Whig Literary Culture*, 24.

[33] John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, "Love and Life," in *Works*, ed. Harold Love (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), 25-26, at line 8; Jonathan Kramnick, *Actions and Objects from Hobbes to Richardson* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2010), 112.

into a literary history that unfolds as perpetual repetition: Rochester again and again, but never a conversion. Such damnation would reify the worst of the moment and block hope for real change. The present, Rowe warns, would be all literature's lot.

Her case carries other powerful implications that I can sketch out in brief. Philosophically speaking, Rowe's critique suggests that the libertine stands for futurelessness. As she writes in a personal letter in which she tries to reform a rake of her acquaintance, "the libertine's golden dreams are perpetually broken and interrupted; every new attainment convinces him too sadly of his delusion; fruition dissolves the pleasing error, and leaves him in despair of ever reaching that point of happiness which his imagination forms" (*MW*, 2:18). His visions—if we substitute sex for death they once again resemble the songs of trapped souls in Rowe's early poetry—break down at the moment of expected fulfillment. When he gets the satisfaction he thinks he wants, he finds that nothing has changed. On this telling libertine wit is bound up with the drive for incessant sexual conquest, and irony must prevail because no actual difference, even for imagination itself, can result. Matter refers to a future that never comes, one whose further triumphs confirm the constraints it cannot escape. Implied in Rowe's position is the strongly revisionist argument that libertine materialism, despite its playful way of reducing everything to matter in motion, actually imposes and enforces a kind of stillness. Materialism's stress on corporeality seems to Rowe to connote not just degradation, that is, but necessity choked into immobility. Once more her response, however understandably off-putting to twenty-first-century ears, attests to her cultural engagement. Warren Chernaik has detailed the manifest contradictions that arise when the libertines bend materialist and deterministic philosophies to the pursuit of power

or pleasure or both. The libertines, in Chernaik's pithy summary, "can justify oppression in the name of freedom."[34] Rowe wants a change patterned after the soul's heavenly future in part because the Dissenter finds that merely bodily life proceeds by perpetuating such oppression.

The political resonances of this view extend to questions about the role of sex in post-Restoration public life. In the hyper-sexualized Caroline court Rowe could pinpoint both the culturally influential vices of Rochester, foster son of Charles II, and the strictures against Dissent authorized by the Clarendon Code.[35] While pitting herself against the unconverted Wilmot and his ilk, Rowe lauds William III as a godly vanquisher. Her early poem on the Battle of the Boyne does as much, as Abigail Williams points out, "using the same elevated verse to celebrate the events of public life that characterized [her] rapturous religious poetry."[36] Perhaps less often examined are the consequences of Rowe's anti-libertinism for ideas of female authorship. Rowe was not the only woman writer whose piety was celebrated as an antidote to prevailing debauchery. James Grantham Turner submits that "moralists and libertines alike [. . .] agreed with Rochester and Etherege that wit derived from the genitalia," and he looks to John Dryden's career for support: "Even when he turns away from Restoration libertine values, Dryden still equates the literary and sexual character of his own culture: the virgin purity of Anne Killegrew will counteract the bawdiness of all other poets, redeeming [in Dryden's phrase] 'this lubrique and adult'rate age.'"[37] The praise

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[34] Chernaik, *Sexual Freedom in Restoration Literature*, 4-5, quoted by Turner, *Libertines and Radicals*, 200.
[35] See Sharon Achinstein, *Literature and Dissent in Milton's England* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003), 59-83.
[36] Williams, *Poetry and the Creation of a Whig Literary Culture*, 189.
[37] Turner, *Libertines and Radicals in Early Modern London*, 44.

of "virgin purity," Turner says, stays within a framework according to which literary values map onto sexual acts. This might be taken to suggest either that male exemplars are exorcising their own demons when they praise such female poets, or that the fraught compliments of late-coming moralists like Dryden equate women's cultural agency with their sexual inactivity. Rowe, however, wants to reject just such a monistic identification of literary agency with the (chaste or licentious) body. Thus she resolves the fears of her early devotional poetry in part by using that identification to characterize, and to condemn, libertine practice in particular. In trying to reconcile spiritual and poetic agency, Rowe strives, I think, to break out of the framework posited by Turner. She cultivates a version of female authorship that seems strategically disembodied or rather post-embodied.

Rowe's opposition to materialism *tout court* is therefore best understood as a reaction against materialism as popularized by Rochester and his contemporaries. The feminist potential of her project assumes that the latter philosophy amounts to (I quote Turner's description of libertine pornographic satire) "a deliberate attempt to confront and neutralize women's efforts to establish their own institutions."[38] The freedom so central to the libertines' self-fashioning, after all, often involves toying with male violence against women. This is a concern that has found too small a purchase in recent work on women writers of the Restoration and early eighteenth century.[39] Often the present-day criticism, enamored (as Rochester was) of Lucretius, gives two misleading impressions: that the capacities of

[38] Turner, *Libertines and Radicals in Early Modern London*, xiii.

[39] See for example Helen Thompson, "Plotting Materialism: W. Charleton's *The Ephesian Matron*, E. Haywood's *Fantomina*, and Feminine Consistency," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35 (2002): 195-214; G. Gabrielle Starr, "Cavendish, Aesthetics, and the Anti-Platonic Line," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 39 (2006): 295-308; and Joseph Drury, "Haywood's Thinking Machines," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 21 (2008-9): 201-28. A treatment alive to the tension I'm describing may be found in Ros Ballaster, "Taking Liberties: Revisiting Behn's Libertinism," *Women's Writing* 19 (2012): 165-76.

materialism easily outweighed the libertine ethos of male violence, and that the rise of female authorship in England unproblematically accompanied or even followed from the celebration of bodies both atomized and eroticized.[40] In this critical landscape one can be forgiven for missing what Richard Terry has taken pains to establish: that Rowe's career solidified for women writers of the next hundred years a durable and oft-invoked alternative.[41] Against a masculinist literature bound by the body, the poet summons a counter-literature of souls, now confined but potentially released and empowered, which are coded as female. No doubt this gender arrangement sounds familiar enough to devotees of *Clarissa*.[42] Still, it took revisionist sensibilities to undermine the powerful old paradigm that associated men with higher souls and women with lower bodies. In raiding a future freedom, Rowe comes to envision an approach by which women writers might revitalize the historically male, though lately degraded, literary sphere that she at first sings of vacating.[43]

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[40] The correlation between literary achievement and estimation of the human body is perhaps most explicit in Lynette McGrath, *Subjectivity and Women's Poetry in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 35-75.

[41] Terry, *Poetry and the Making of the English Literary Past*, 284-85. Rowe becomes a standard for female writers who seem suitable for canonization: "Clarissa figure[s]", Terry calls them, whose "literariness is counterpart with, or even an expression of, [their] essential victimhood" (285). Though correct as far as it goes, Terry's discussion doesn't account for the dimension of critique that I'm pursuing in this section.

[42] Compare John Richetti, *Popular Fiction before Richardson: Narrative Patterns 1700-1739* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 247.

[43] Rowe's grasping at heavenly disembodiment calls to mind Catherine Gallagher's case that women writers of this period fashioned "'author-selves,'" that is, "partly disembodied entities required by the specific exchanges that constituted their careers." But Rowe's attraction to disembodiment was not merely careerist. Gallagher's argument must in this case be supplemented by Phyllis Mack's elaboration of a religious "conception of agency [. . .] in which the energy to act in the world is generated and sustained by a prior act of personal surrender." See Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670-1820* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1994), xix; and Phyllis Mack, "Religion, Feminism, and the Problem of Agency: Reflections on Eighteenth-Century Quakerism," *Signs* 29 (2003): 149-77, at 156, later reworked in Mack's *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment: Gender and Emotion in Early Methodism* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008).

The theological implications of Rowe's anti-libertinism also merit attention, especially because they have a bearing on the Socinianism that Milton reassesses over the course of his career. To link the libertine body with stasis and the separable soul with change, Rowe must repudiate the heterodox principle that the soul and body are inseparable and have to coexist in reciprocal relation. (Her allergy to this materialist idea of soul-body coinherence is in fact strong enough, as we've seen in her angelism, to provoke overcompensating responses.) Within the ambit of her critique the devotional poet thus includes a resurgent Socinianism, which for its own contingent reasons would not sunder soul from body. As in the letter to the libertine she knows, Rowe faults those who dispute the immortality of the soul—"without which reason is our greatest curse, an inseparable plague" (*MW*, 2:17)—for licensing irresponsible carnality, even if by accident. This same logic allowed many of her contemporaries to tar the Socinians with the vices of the libertines. The republication of John Biddle's works in the Unitarian tracts of the 1690s ensured that the firebrand would remain one prominent target of orthodox attacks, despite attempts by his followers "to make his theology and his reputation more respectable" and to plead the reasonableness of their case for a further reformation. Perhaps more unforgivable than his anti-trinitarianism, as Nigel Smith indicates, was the late Biddle's ascription to God of "a body that existed in a specific place and which had a specific shape," down to left and right hands.[44] For the cantankerous non-juror Charles Leslie, Biddle the "*Semi-Socinian*" thus

[44] Nigel Smith, "'And if God was one of us': Paul Best, John Biddle, and Anti-Trinitarian Heresy in Seventeenth-Century England," in *Heresy, Literature, and Politics in Early Modern English Culture*, ed. David Loewenstein and John Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006), 160-84, at 175, 169. See also Barbara K. Lewalski, *The Life of John Milton: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 328; and J.A.I. Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken: The Church of England and its Enemies, 1660-1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), 106.

stood front and center among the revolution's "monstrous Herds of *Heterogeneous Heresies*," now returning a riot of grotesque and sexualized bodies upon a society grown once again too tolerant.[45] Leslie was not being innovative. Over sixty years earlier Francis Cheynell had attacked the Socinians for not keeping their bodies in order, declaring that they first succumbed to "'Arminian Libertinism'" and eventually stoked "'Atheistical Libertinisme.'"[46] While that last word didn't have to relate to sex, the late-century Socinians were made to reap what, as Christopher Hill notes, other sectarians had sown: an expectation that heterodoxy regarding the immortal soul had as its outcome bodily license.[47] On Hill's account, arch conservatives like Leslie saw the situation quite clearly—for Hill thinks that the libertines are the rightful heirs of the mid-century revolutionaries.

It wasn't just the reactionaries, though, who maligned the Socinians as libertines in consequence. Theological moderates did so too. Gilbert Burnet, for instance, identified above as the author of Rochester's deathbed-conversion narrative, was a full-throated latitudinarian cleric, promoted by the new king to the see of Salisbury in 1689. The bishop stood firm against High Church enemies when supporting William's claim to the throne, justifying his own (questionably orthodox) understanding of the Trinity, and advocating comprehension for Dissenters within the Church of England. Despite all that, as the century drew to a close Burnet increasingly conflated Socinians with libertines and "sodomites" and

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[45] Charles Leslie, *The Socinian Controversy Discuss'd: Wherein the Chief of the Socinian Tracts (Publish'd of Late Years Here) Are Consider'd* (London: Strahan, 1708), part VI, xxxvi.

[46] Francis Cheynell, *The Rise, Growth and Danger of Socinianisme* (1643), quoted in John Marshall, *John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture: Religious Intolerance and Arguments for Religious Toleration in Early Modern and "Early Enlightenment" Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006), 291.

[47] Hill claims that when Abiezer Coppe puckishly called God's service "'perfect freedom and pure libertinism,'" he clearly intended the term's "specifically sexual sense." "Freethinking and Libertinism: The Legacy of the English Revolution," in *Margins of Orthodoxy*, ed. Lund, 54-70, at 61, 64.

called for what he termed the "repression" of the three groups in common.[48] Less dramatic cases share a similar outline: in defending their own positions even latitudinarians who were personally friendly to Socinians sought to dissociate themselves from Socinianism. Thus they abetted the fear that this heterodoxy could underwrite deviant behavior.

If, as seems almost certain, Rowe agreed that all who denied the soul's immortality contributed to a libertine fixation on bodies, then it's no wonder some of her poetry serves to pull Milton away from the materialism she identifies in her opponents. Another Whig admirer and would-be reformer lamented that Milton was "a little tainted with Socinianism."[49] But Rowe stresses Milton's angels more than his Son. I don't want to impute to her a conscious misreading akin to what Hill derides as "Addison's deliberate sanitizing of Milton."[50] Rather, I suspect that the sheer usefulness of her figuration of change in terms of the soul's release is what took priority. It is the persistence of this figure—strengthened by her fascination with angelic existence, tempered by her own distance from centers of power, adjusted amid a politically charged backlash against libertine values—that seems to inform her appropriations of *Paradise Lost*. In the previous chapter I tried to draw continuities between Milton's futural vision and that of the Socinians, as illustrated by Biddle. The idea of movement that emerges is indexed to resurrection. The best the late Milton could hope for was gradual progress: hence the slowness of what at the outset I called the diffuse vitalist dream adumbrated in Raphael's speech to Adam. Yet for Rowe's heady and acquisitive

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[48] Marshall, *John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture*, 717-18. Marshall points out that John Locke by contrast decried "sexual libertinism" but continued to support toleration for the Socinians throughout this period.
[49] John Dennis, *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry* (1704), in *The Critical Works*, ed. Edward Niles Hooker (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1939), 1:345.
[50] Hill, "Freethinking and Libertinism," 65.

spiritualism, such an evolution proves too slow to be of value. If, as I argued previously, *Paradise Regain'd* interprets patience as work of its own, then to Rowe that labor looks awfully like acquiescence to confinement in present bonds. The slow vitalist way of reading Raphael's speech renders the late Milton, in this specific sense, insufficiently revolutionary. However, to speculate a bit further, it probably never crosses Rowe's mind to look in Milton for a materialist aesthetic, one that in her view typifies the court of Charles and makes play with licentiousness, male violence, and nihilism. To do so would bind Milton to the status quo, to the libertine's futurelessness. Rowe, reading Raphael's prophecy otherwise, thus hurries and instrumentalizes the soul's evolution in order to forge difference. Although the libertine becomes a fallen angel and finds only sameness in a Milton-inspired hell, *Divine Hymns and Poems* proposes another option for English literary culture, a heavenly future within grasp. Rowe accordingly grows every bit as preoccupied as her adversary with the present time. She reproaches the libertine's sense that the now is all there is; but it is toward the now that she means to wrench an altered angelic future.

"LAUNCHING OUT INTO THE OTHER": RELEASE AND RETURN

Though the hellbound libertine grieves his failure to live differently before death, Rowe's next contribution to *Divine Hymns and Poems* doesn't proceed by means of an "undoing" plot, a return to the past to uproot some baleful aspect of contemporary life.[51] The poet wants to travel forward in time instead. Her heavenly poetry therefore interjects enthusiasm as a reparative practice: a way of rehearsing the all-spiritual future's potential

[51] See Catherine Gallagher, "Undoing," in *Time and the Literary*, ed. Karen Newman, Jay Clayton, and Marianne Hirsch (New York: Routledge, 2002), 11-29.

difference from the present.[52] To the consternation of even sympathetic readers, Rowe spoke of her own ventures into the angelic realm, and her mature devotional poetry appears on its surface to describe them.[53] As I mentioned early on, however, the poet acknowledges that these presumptive flights into her soul's own future may be delusional. They may be, she admits, only literary; but on literary terms they may nonetheless be justified. So when Sharon Achinstein defines enthusiasm as the human possibility of a "spontaneous, immediate relation with the divine," we should be aware that while Rowe agrees in principle, her enthusiastic poetry tends to be more self-conscious in its staging.[54] First, her proximity to the divine is mediated in the sense that she imagines herself achieving, not direct contact with God, but the mobility and power appropriate to God's faithful angels. Second, Rowe wants to perform the soul's journey to a heavenly future for the sake of her audience. Movement becomes possible when the faithful Christian becomes the impatient Christian, when she no longer sees heaven as exclusively tomorrow's reward for today's longsuffering. Enthusiasm facilitates this development by providing Rowe, who had long thought that heaven unlocks the soul's true freedom, a vocabulary for tapping into that energy now. Or say rather that Rowe's developing thoughts about enthusiasm create gaps in the boundary that divides heaven from hell, freedom from confinement, allowing her along with her

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[52] See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is about You," in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2003), 146.

[53] A 1761 dictionary entry resorts to natural supernaturalism as a way of explaining, if not excusing, Rowe's claims about the spiritual life: "[Rowe] was a warm devotee, so as to border on what some might call enthusiasm; and this habit, which grew naturally from constitution in her, was also powerfully confirmed by education and example". *A New and General Biographical Dictionary*, 11 vols. (London: T. Osborne, et al., 1761-62), 10: 184.

[54] Achinstein, *Literature and Dissent*, 248. It is significant that Achinstein's definition itself surfaces in a discussion of the tropes characteristic of dissenting verse.

readers to imagine crossing over for an interval. The author's heavenly poetry presumes to supply release to these fellow souls: the textual practice of immortality. Moreover, Rowe's heavenly excursions extend her implicit assessment of literary culture. In this verse she illustrates the change she hopes to accomplish for English poetry at large. But the work of reform demands that souls come back to the present; thus Rowe, as I will propose in concluding this section, comes to thematize the limits imposed by the bodies she maligns.

Shortly after her early work was collected and published as *Poems on Several Occasions*, Rowe took an initial stab at synthesizing an apology for poetry with a claim for passage into a heavenly angelic future. The attempt appears in a 1697 letter, probably directed to the Thynnes, soon to be the parents of the poet's much younger friend and eventual patron Frances, later Lady Hertford. Having quoted religious verse from John Norris, previously a participant in John Dunton's Athenian Society and in time a contributor to *Divine Hymns and Poems*, and from Abraham Cowley, the writer ends the letter with poetry of her own. Along the way she makes a stirring case for solitude before choicest society. Solitude, in fact, opens upon a different society. It enables the young writer to commune with spirits, she says. Her conjuring obviously frightened Rowe's older correspondents, who have chided her for her "odd conceits." The author holds firm in reply, maligning the "tyranny of custom" and the "insipid subjects" that together govern polite conversation. She still prefers, she evocatively writes, "launching out into the other," where she can "entertain [herself] with much more noble and lasting speculations." I take that magnificent "other" to point to change, disembodiment, futurity, and heaven all at once, and the verb "entertain" to prefigure her later, more explicit admission that her "speculations" might not be transparent

representations of spiritual experience. In a pattern that we've seen before, Rowe follows her prose assertion of access to an all-spiritual state with lines of verse that adopt the soul's perspective as it soars in a heavenly condition. The poem's culminating passage unifies the beholder and the beheld in heavenly ecstasy:

> Ranging thro' heaven's vast tract, methinks, I hear
> Th' harmonious music of each heav'nly sphere,
> Swarms of new worlds discover, and survey
> The sparkling glories of the milky way.
>
> Now thro' th' empyrean heav'n I freely rove,
> And feast my senses on the throne of Jove,
> View those eternal mansions, where the blest
> Are rapt with joys too great to be exprest.[55]

The preceding prose defends her intimations of spiritual flight, but when Rowe wants to demonstrate the imaginative launch she turns to poetic conventions. That the turn to poetry actuates an evolved point of view is established by the music of the spheres, which only angels can hear. As an alternative to confinement in the earthly body, in the years of her youth, or perhaps at a deadening dinner party, Rowe's detached spirit can "freely rove."

One might object that a disembodied being cannot have the poem's subsequent sensory experiences, but here again the poet, in line with other anti-materialist thinkers of the period, seems to presume that the released soul acquires broadened perceptual faculties. The richness of the sensory "feast" is then indicative both of the "sparkling glories"

[55] Rowe, Letter 5, *MW* 2: 26, 28-29. In this posthumous edition, coordinated by the poet's brother-in-law, the sequence of letters comes addressed only to "To the Honble Mrs. --------".

themselves and the changed means by which the now-angelic speaker perceives them. Another potential objection returns us to Rowe's allusive engagement with Milton. In *Paradise Lost*, after all, it is Satan who "ascending rides | Audacious" through the heavens in search of "some other place" (*PL*, II.930-31, 977). The objection can't be evaded: if Rowe's rejection of the "tyranny of custom" is in urgent respects Miltonic, in others it is satanic, a justification for taking new powers for herself. One might more equably say that Rowe wants to reclaim for the faithful (if acquisitive) soul the sublimity that John Dennis, for example, near the source of a long critical stream, was busy detecting in Milton's depiction of Satan.[56] Even so, the allusion presents difficulties for the young poet. No doubt unwittingly she calls up Satan's flight through space and accidentally gives credence to her correspondents' concern that her aversion to polite society might embroil her in a dangerous disobedience. Perhaps souls are meant to stay in the present, in their ordained chains. And if Rowe is in the process of enlisting sublimity for a modified religious enthusiasm, the soul's flight in this case gets caught up in self-reference. She has not yet articulated how the poetic release can be a social act as well as a private idiosyncrasy, eliciting response and possibly opening up new worlds for English verse to inhabit. Not yet having refined her language for a present-day plague (that deluge of libertinism) that needs containing, the poet doesn't indicate what she needs to seek in an angelic future besides her sheer desire for otherness. Here she settles for a kind of preliminary self-canonization, pitching herself toward "the blest," among whom stand, by implication, her fellow divine poets Norris and Cowley.

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[56] On Dennis's *The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry* (1701) and *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry* (1704), see Shaun Irlam, *Elations: The Poetics of Enthusiasm in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1999), 60-82; and Williams, *Poetry and the Creation of a Whig Literary Culture*, esp. 183-87. Note that whereas Dennis takes pains to reclaim enthusiasm from the rabble, Rowe's letter justifies enthusiastic flight in terms of her irritation with polite sociability.

Around the same time, though, as I've noted, Rowe was working through anxieties about the potential incongruity between this self-understanding and her earnest aspiration, voiced in an earlier letter, to become a "guardian angel" (*MW*, 2:24).

Around a decade later, with the appearance of *Divine Hymns and Poems*, Rowe writes as though she's broken through the impasse. In "On Heaven," a companion piece that appears just after "A Description of Hell" in the anthology, the obedient soul again soars into a future angelic state. Faithful to the anthology's criticism of dominant literary values, the author begins in a metapoetic register. Rather than, as in the example just discussed, adopt from the outset the vantage of the released soul in flight, Rowe here uses her invocation to examine the practice of detachment. The Whig poet is by no means alone in adequating a "Christianized sublime" to an argument for "an elevated native poetry," to use Williams's phrasing,[57] but this text does more than is typical in ruminating on the mechanics of elevation. Rowe's seasoned portrayal of heaven assumes that imitation can supply true inspiration, making the mind's flight potentially social and making it, more specifically, processual. The opening lines about heaven are therefore about what it takes to see heaven in the present day, about the new perceptual possibilities afforded not by bodily death but by the enthusiastic verse the reader has to hand:

> What glorious things of thee, O glorious Place!
> Shall my bold Muse in daring Numbers speak?
> While to Immortal Strains I tune my Lyre,
> And warbling imitate Angelick Airs:

[57] Williams, *Poetry and the Creation of a Whig Literary Culture*, 182.

While extasie bears up my Soul aloft,

And lively Faith gives me a distant Glimpse

Of Glories unreveal'd to humane Eyes. (*DHP*, 90-91)

The young Milton beckons his similarly bold muse to "join thy voice unto the angel quire,"[58] but Rowe shows her own "Soul" rising in compatibility with the angels it presumes to join. Prophetic strains thus become "Immortal" ones, a quality of the soul as Rowe defines it transferred to its song. Poetry must now perform rather than presuppose the soul's release. (A subsequent chapter on Edward Young will explore some of the anxieties that attend this change.) And for Rowe it is a certain form of music, to which the singer "tune[s]" her lyre in our imagined hearing, that invokes and assists this bearing up. From the Nativity Ode to the epic, Milton dared to seek what Rowe calls "Glories unreveal'd" by reaching back and anticipating the glories that have been disclosed by text and tradition ("O run, prevent them"). Rowe by contrast stretches ahead to an all-spiritual future, pulling the "distant," which on her accelerated terms is already not very remote, even closer. Now her poetic soul can sing, whereas in the poem from her earlier letter it only hears, the music of angels. The heavenly song itself, first tuned then warbled, seems to cast a spell during which the detached soul, first rising then glimpsing, finds privileged insight. Within the necessarily delimited temporal confines of the performance ("While extasie bears up my Soul aloft"), the soul can range over an expedited heaven. Indeed, the two parallel lines beginning with "While" seem to set the conditions under which the possibilities that follow, as indicated in the corresponding and upward thrusting lines beginning with "And," may be realized.

[58] John Milton, *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, in *Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. John Carey (London: Longman, 1971), 102.

Tellingly, then, "On Heaven" commences on earth. Change, the freedom of the soul in ecstatic rupture from the body, remains associated with a personalized angelic future but is now reachable in and for the present. The proleptic song allows the practiced soul to leap ahead to the state of the blessed. Other metaphors work equally as well: perhaps the song bends the line that would otherwise keep the faithful soul's present at a remove from its changed future; or perhaps the soul can slip through a temporarily porous spot in the wall that divides heaven's freedom from hell's confinement. In any case the faithful soul can achieve new mobility by way of an altered temporality. The spell itself appears confined to the realm of poetry, however. "But, Ah," the text's final lines run,

> I must return, no more allow'd
> To breathe the calm, the soft, celestial, Air,
> And view the mystick Wonders of the Skies. (*DHP*, 95)

This is one corollary to Rowe's acknowledgement that her enthusiastic performances might be no more than literary: the flight must end with the lyre-plucked song. The soul's new freedom is counted in, and its enacted perception of change is applied to, time-bound performance. Yet to say so is only to phrase negatively the powerful synthesis that Rowe achieves in the conceit of imitating "Angelick Airs." Faithful souls will become heavenly angels, a shared immortality being the metaphysical trait that underlies this evolution. The induction to "On Heaven" meanwhile renders song the mode of immortality, by recourse to which the soul can provisionally ascend. The enthusiast's agency lies in her capacity to prepare and to perform—in a word, to practice—this kind of heavenly lyric. To preview its angelic future, or perhaps just to make it up, the soul can submit to the enabling conditions

of new devotional poetry. This appraisal of verse revisits but also amplifies the call for a renewed poetic culture sounded in the preface to *Divine Hymns and Poems*. The soul's transformation once more maps onto English poetry's, this time because the soul that wants to break free from an overbodied present is said to need a heavenly song to sing.

"On Heaven" adopts an enthusiastic temporality, claiming a future that reformed verse can put to use in the present. The poetic future that the text envisages is in the first place Miltonic, with suitable adjustments given what we know about Rowe's approach to Milton. Her companion poems, striving for the sublimity epitomized by spirits in flight, look to the formal model of Milton's blank verse. Achinstein says that Rowe repurposes the form of *Paradise Lost* to "elevate the drama of spiritual longing to an epic scale."[59] Now this might mean that Rowe uses blank verse to enlarge the boundaries of interiority. At least theoretically, however, Rowe aspires to escape from, not redraw, those boundaries: to penetrate the limits that define interiority by keeping the mind within the earthly body. If she views Milton's verse style, with its "sense variously drawn out," as contributing to the unformed masses and interstellar reaches of his great epic,[60] then she appropriates a version of that style in "On Heaven" to propel the enthusiastic mind outward. For the more domestic and indeed confined longings of Eden, Rowe appears to have little patience. She doesn't seem interested in a poetry that would reestablish an idyllic garden or a harmonious settlement between human bodies and the natural order. Her angelic aspirations are loco-descriptive in a different sense, emphasizing in their way space flight as time travel.

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[59] Achinstein, *Literature* 249. Achinstein is characterizing the Devout Soliloquies, a late and posthumously published blank-verse sequence. As should be clear, though, Rowe's reconceptualization of the Miltonic begins much earlier.

[60] Milton, "The Verse", *Paradise Lost*, ed. Fowler, page 55.

Such propulsion can, as Rowe's earlier letter maintains, take place in private; and "On Heaven" proceeds to reveal that the soul is never more at home than when ranging over heaven:

> Ye starry Mansions hail: My native Skies:
> Here in my Happy Pre-existent State
> (A spotless Mind) I led the Life of Gods.
> But passing, I salute you, and advance
> To yonder brighter Realms allow'd Access. (*DHP*, 91)

Startlingly, the poet moves from announcing the soul's immortality to asserting the heterodox idea of its preexistence. In a passage that resists tidy resolution, Rowe's pliable temporality appears to make an angelic future loop back to meet an angelic past. Here the soul is not just (as elsewhere for Rowe) rapidly evolving into an angel; rather it is resuming an angelic state.[61] These lines thus keep alive the implicit associations I noted above, in surveying *Poems on Several Occasions*, between the embodied human soul and the fallen angel. For both, the agony of captivity seems to derive from firsthand knowledge of freedom. The future that Rowe conceives as available now appears predicated upon the soul's prior life in heaven: the released soul can explore heaven because it's been there before. As so often, the poet reroutes theological problems (the obvious parallel is the hotly debated issue of the Son of God's pre-existence) through the imagined experience of angelic beings. Much more speculatively, this passage seems to redraw the trajectory of *Paradise Lost* by hypothesizing

[61] David Berman has convincingly demonstrated that Berkeley, when theorizing about time and the soul's separability, may have stumbled upon the same conundrum: "Berkeley's novel theory of immortality seems to lead to the conclusion that the soul is an eternal being which cannot be created or destroyed." *George Berkeley: Idealism and the Man* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 69.

what it would be like for fallen angels to make their return to heaven: once they were here, then they were exiled, and now they are here once more. In any case the speaker, after beginning in an act of imitation, soon finds splendors of familiarity. What I think Rowe is more consciously after is the sense that modern devotional verse, though seemingly low and late-coming, in fact restores the primal and spiritual situation of poetry. In the angels, later called "spotless Minds," the poetic soul, here likewise a "spotless Mind," detects its own native substance. The soul starts by "warbling" its song; later it hears angels "warble their Heroick Loves." The angels' wings, furthermore, are described as Aeolian instruments that accompany lyres like the poet's own: "trembling Winds upon their fragrant Wings | Bear far the soft melodious Sounds away." But the sounds are already being imitated by the singer, who thereby ensures that the winds will reach all the way to earth and inspire other souls with angelic music to imitate. Earlier I quoted from Milton's note on the verse of *Paradise Lost*, and this recognition sequence in "On Heaven" takes up another of that note's arguments. Rowe too, in her way, wants to pronounce an "ancient liberty recovered to heroic poem."[62] With a fascinating slip into the marginalized theological idea of the soul's preexistence, she lays claim to a future for a refitted Miltonic poetry that can reassert the soul's originary freedom, freedom that antedates and in turn trumps her current marginalization in an age of libertine cultural values.

The balance of "On Heaven" affirms that the released soul has a penchant for description. Rowe begins the text by figuring the soul's rise, interweaving poet and reader in

[62] Milton, "The Verse", *Paradise Lost*, ed. Fowler, page 55.

performed flight. When she arrives at heaven's "brighter Realms," she focalizes the soul's descriptions (and putatively the reader's experience) through the angels near God's throne:

> for you alone can tell,
>
> For you alone those Raptures can describe,
>
> And stem th' impetuous Floods of Joy that rise
>
> Within your Breasts, when all unvail'd you View
>
> The Wonders of the Beatifick Sight[.]

Here the enthusiastic soul-as-singer alights on a rich formulation of heavenly poetics. Having characterized the throne of God as blinding, Rowe beckons the highest order of angels to "communicate [God's] Bliss." For the forms of divine verse cannot be simply imitative, unmediated, in their effects: the utmost raptures, if "unveil'd," would overwhelm all but these most blessed angels. Even ecstatic poetry requires control, therefore. To "describe" God at all, these beings must "stem" the ineffable affective floods unleashed by his presence and channel them into a useable flow. Literalizing this metaphor into an organizational scheme, the poem's subsequent descriptions course away from the divine throne and follow the "Spring of Joy" out across the "verdant Fields of Paradice." Yet the descriptive tendency of "On Heaven" reaches a climax only when the poet finally returns to the angels' poetic practice and assesses their song. Before the unavoidable descent to earth, the poet exults in the "Heav'nly Skill" evident in the "lofty Strains" that prompt God's name to resound, the stars to dance, the trees of life to "bloom out afresh," and the faithful to fly in transport (*DHP*, 92-95). A self-reflexive crescendo, the passage exults in that which it aches to be. The soul's provisional flight finally makes possible an immediate apprehension, not of God, but

of the angels' poetry. In heaven it is the skill of their divine performance that yields ever changing forms of love and admiration. In such a future the libertine threat has been contained; maybe even the fallen angels have converted and have recovered their freedom to join in the singing. Rowe wants to conduct that song's raptures back into, and thus redirect, the main current of English verse.

Having conceptualized change in this way, the poet's vision doesn't itself change much in her later devotional works. In the thirteen-stanza ode called "The Conflagration," for instance, Rowe offers a description of the resurrection and final judgment that would seem to require a departure from her stress on all-spiritual life. The poem orchestrates the movement of detached souls back to the ultimate state of corporeality promised in scripture. While they resume "their former vehicles," the "wheels of nature" overturn the "long establish'd laws of motion" (*MW*, 1: 86, 87). Nonetheless the writer preserves her overarching division between heaven and hell; by no means does the final judgment in this poem inaugurate a new earth. To the contrary, it only finishes what Rowe's work in *Divine Hymns and Poems* has already affirmed for present-day life: the faithful on earth gain access to heaven, while the reprobate, having refused available change, are swallowed up wholly by the hell that already in some sense contains them. Remarkably, the re-embodied faithful still become angels:

> down ten thousand heav'nly guardians fly,
> T' attend their joyful charges to the sky:
> And upward now with wond'rous state they move[.]

Perhaps drawing upon an alternative tradition of bodily translation, the poet raises the bodies of the faithful from the dust only to raise them further, to the skies.[63] The "apostate spirits rage" once more when they "see the humble race of man supply | Their once illustrious stations in the sky." And hell, though it almost feels like a formality, finishes its colonization of earth at last:

> Th' unfathom'd deep to swallow them gapes wide;
>
> And now without controul
>
> The fiery surges roll,
>
> And hell extends itself on ev'ry side[.] (*MW*, 1:91)

The earthly body reasserted by the Christian doctrine of resurrection can, with some liberties, be forced into an angelic framework. True, "The Conflagration" marks an extreme case. Rowe almost seems unable to see the bodies as they are reconstituted, the repressed as it returns, in her poem. Doing so would perhaps demand confronting anew the agonies and indecencies suffered in those "former vehicles." So thoroughly has the poet equated release into an angelic state with new freedom that the resurrection, unless it too can push the faithful up to heaven's angels, seems to entail a relapse into bondage, a regression to mean structures.[64] Even in this distinctive instance, though, Rowe makes a characteristic move. She uses the re-imposition of the body to figure for a limit.

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[63] Rowe deploys the same imagery in "The Translation of Elijah" (*MW*, 1: 57-58). One might say that in this poem, as in the "Conflagration" ode, Rowe admits glorified bodies so long as they behave like exalted souls.

[64] Her fears about resurrection manifest themselves likewise in the early poem "Thoughts on Death," in which the specter of an "After-day," a return to embodiment which is indistinguishable from judgment, paralyzes the speaker who could otherwise happily accept bodily death. The poet can celebrate the one change; but to her mind the other seems to renege on the first. See *ESR*, 28-29.

Such returns tend to conclude her sojourns into an angelic future. Provisionally detached souls, as we saw in "On Heaven," must resume their lives in the earthly body. Now descent is admittedly a conventional trope for the Whig sublime: Williams rightly lists Rowe among writers for whom "it seems that, paradoxically, it was in the very failure to attain a coherent and consistent elevation that the true sublime was most evident."[65] That word "failure," however, might gloss over some of the more specific issues I've tried to foreground. When Rowe's devotional poems sing of their own necessary ending, the author revolves the limits of her own critique of dominant strains in her culture and, I think, reminds herself of her place in that culture. As a further example standing for others, here is a transition across stanzas in Soliloquy XLI, one of Rowe's Devout Soliloquies:

> Here let my ravish'd soul for ever dwell,
> Here let me gaze, nor turn one careless look
> On yonder hated world, here let me drink
> Full draughts of bliss, and bathe in boundless floods
> Of life and joy, here let me still converse.
>
> IT cannot be! Mortality returns.
> Ye radiant skies, adieu! ye starry worlds,
> Ye blissful scenes, and walks of paradise!
> I must fulfil my day, and wait the hour
> That brings eternal liberty and rest. (*MW*, 1:244)

[65] Williams, *Poetry and the Creation of a Whig Literary Culture*, 195.

Although the Soliloquies have a softer polemical edge, this passage still calls up the social structures that the poet wanted by turns to flee and to reform. In the first stanza we hear the voice of the soul relishing her detachment from a world of pain and subordination. The speaker has arrived in song at the heavenly future craved in *Poems on Several Occasions*; her voice recalls the performative interpolated verse in Rowe's letters. No shadow of sinking threatens. In the subsequent stanza we hear the soul in a different register, the one that ends "On Heaven": now the speaker turns back to the mortal body, momentary escape from which was the song's necessary condition. The future she penetrates is not yet hers, or rather is only hers inasmuch as it's the future of her present. Enthusiastic flights into futurity cannot be made to last for long, and Rowe seems to accept this dictum. Her poem, however, continues for a stretch (even after the verse in her letters would shift back to prose), and it validates its own need to conclude. Perhaps "fulfil my day" need not be read as exactly synonymous with "wait the hour." The body calls Rowe back, and this is to be accepted and lamented, but perhaps Rowe likewise calls back the body. Which may only be to say that into her perpetual dream of release, she grafts a structure for renovation. The next stanza after the lines quoted above includes this plea: "Permit me, ye gay realms, permit me oft | To visit you, and meditate your joys" (*MW*, 1:244). The prospect of heavenly newness becomes a practice that demands re-immersion in the "gloomy waste" of material life, which can only be understood by those who have seen from outside it (*MW*, 1:244). The poet must "fulfil" the promise of her era's literary culture by changing it, putting to present-day uses the heavenly and future-directed visions that would seem to divorce her from that culture. Rowe writes her Devout Soliloquies, after all, and she writes them in blank verse.

CONCLUSION

Rowe's devotional verse represents one of several implicit attempts in the early eighteenth century to rethink *Paradise Regain'd*, all undertaken with a view to clutching at a prospective futurity. Milton proceeds from the cosmic flights of *Paradise Lost* to the earthbound trials and painstaking labors of the brief epic, but Rowe moves the other way, resituating human souls among angels either reprobate or obedient. She adopts an angel-centric vision like the character Raphael's rather than a vitalist and materialist vision like Milton's; indeed she takes the one to oppose the other. Her heady and clutching Whig optimism will not wait for a slow evolution to come. The dissenting woman poet seems to think that the fruits of usual cultural development, if they come at all, will not be fairly distributed; and she works out a devotional poetry that in imagining ruptures from the bodily present might impose changes upon it. This phrasing returns us to the politics of the intermediate state of souls. Early on I referred to a common enough politico-theological expectation that the intermediate state, by positing individualized rewards and punishments just after bodily death, serves the social function of keeping people in line. The judge sits ever at his bench, on this view, and your case will begin as soon as it can. Rowe, however, clamoring for the resources of a different condition, reveals social possibilities for the detachability of souls that cut the other way. In the intermediate state she locates wholesale difference, difference that is furthermore close enough to feel. She imaginatively plunders that state in resisting, while sometimes superficially accepting, stifling positions of ostracism. Recognizing that she may be fooling herself, she nevertheless writes out the achievement of greater liberty.

Even as she rejects the radical materialism of the libertines, of many of the Socinians, and of Milton, Rowe appears to cultivate a potential radicalism, a radicalism of the potential, in her poetry. She pushes into a new freedom that she just can't defer. A future moving "all to spirit" signifies increasing proximity to the divine, yes, but for Rowe it more powerfully evokes perpetual difference and the hope for capacities ever new. This revolutionary sensibility is deeply latent but still surprising.[66] Christopher Hill has influentially speculated that the radicalism of Rowe's day had to survive orally. In print the radicals of the Restoration-era and early eighteenth century were, he says, "too prudent to stress the origin of their ideas in the regicide republic," and the cautious publishing market selected against such counterexamples as there were.[67] Nor can the poet rightly be associated with the threads of radical Dissent and antinomianism that E.P. Thompson traces from Milton's time ahead to Blake's.[68] By contrast Rowe's radicalism, such as it is, pulses through what now passes as orthodox, indeed fideistic moralizing. We have missed her strangeness for her piety. In rerouting *Paradise Lost* and recruiting detached angelic souls to check the libertines, Rowe makes a signal contribution to realizing a future in which it would seem perfectly normal for Blake, that later despiser of materialism, to recruit Milton for an attack on the confining bodies of Restoration science, philosophy, and theology.

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[66] At several points in "Whigs in Heaven" (see note 4, above), Walmsley refers to Rowe as a "radical." On his terms the characterization seems wrongheaded; I am trying to suggest others in which it might be prescient.

[67] Hill, "Freethinking and Libertinism," 64.

[68] See especially E.P. Thompson, *Witness against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law* (New York: New Press, 1993).

Chapter Three: Growth for Time in Young's *Night Thoughts*

The sixth and seventh installments of *Night Thoughts*—the collective title given to *The Complaint: or, Night-Thoughts on Life, Death, & Immortality* (1742) and the eight further poems in blank verse spawned by it (1742-46)—together constitute a distinct work that the poet Edward Young calls "The Infidel Reclaim'd." In the preface to Night VI Young explains that "most, if not all, our Infidels" owe their erroneous views to "some doubt of their *Immortality*." "And I am satisfied," he adds, "that Men once thoroughly convinced of their Immortality, are not far from being Christians."[1] In Night VI he proposes to offer arguments for human immortality drawn from nature and "derived from Principles which Infidels admit in common with Believers" (*NT*, 147-48). The poet presumes to meet infidels—atheists, freethinkers, deists, and mortalists—on their own ground. In his preface to Night VII Young repeats the bit about the consequences of doubting one's immortality, but then he acknowledges why people fall into this error: "For it is impossible to bid Defiance to final Ruin, without some Refuge in Imagination, some Presumption of Escape." Only two options, the poet declares, are really open to non-believers. First, they might hold that God either can't or won't punish the wicked—a view that Young deems absurd. Second, they might contend that the soul ceases existing after bodily death. The author understands the appeal of this option to non-believers: "In Non-existence, therefore, is their only Refuge; and, consequently, Non-existence is their strongest Wish" (*NT*, 175). So while

[1] Edward Young, *Night Thoughts*, ed. Stephen Cornford (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008), p. 147; hereafter *NT*. In this paragraph, further references to the prefaces to Nights VI and VII are cited parenthetically by page number. References to the poetry are cited parenthetically throughout by Night and line numbers.

Night VI looks to the natural world for proofs of immortality, Night VII looks to humanity in general and infidels in particular, as exemplified by the interlocutor Young addresses throughout *Night Thoughts*: a libertine named Lorenzo. But the poet doesn't oppose cold hard truths to his imagined opponent's "strongest Wish[es]." Instead he elaborates an apology that sets out from those yearnings. The result is a conception of futurity as spatial expansion propelled by desire.

Even though in making this case I'll focus primarily on "The Infidel Reclaim'd," Young's ideas about the reach of the soul lend shape and direction to *Night Thoughts* taken as an ungainly whole. The poet depicts the immortal human soul as both a subject and a technology, a voyager through multiple times and an instrument for realizing them.[2] The soul draws together the human present with a post-embodied future, though perhaps also (more problematically for Young) with a pre-embodied past. *Night Thoughts* takes for granted that this collation of different times can become a felt experience through religious or even poetic enthusiasm, which promises exercise for the atrophied soul of the libertine. "The Future of the Present is the Soul," Young gnomically stipulates (*NT*, VII.639), and the soul in his poem needs the reciprocity it facilitates. Young imagines futurity as a potent resource that can be provisionally tapped here and now, but only by means of the soul—no separable soul, no accessible futurity—and only given the further assumption that more such power always lies in reserve. If the future harbors energy for change that can be claimed already, it must also harbor what will come to be seen as further change. Without simply oscillating

[2] My thinking about this set of claims has been shaped by Jonathan Gil Harris, *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2009). Though I adopt neither Harris's terminology nor his emphasis on things, his contrast between a temporality of supersession and one of conjunction has been especially helpful. That the soul may be at once an object of thought and a thinking subject is an empowering (if often self-indulgent) presupposition of Young's poem.

back to the now, it has to carry what's different (the not-now) and what's different from that. Young thus conjures reserves of futurity that, to be as endless as he demands, proliferate new possibilities beyond what he can foretell or control.

His boundless futurity very much resembles Milton's Chaos, another necessary yet necessarily unpredictable substrate that can be mined for the new. On Young's scheme, however, the soul itself does the mining, whereas for Milton it's God who may unfurl new creations out of his own dark materials. The power to range through limitless worlds, a power that Young's poem articulates through changes of textual and perceptual scale, keeps the soul from having to return to the ground of a singular God. This expansionist vision disallows other returns, as well, specifically returns to the body or the earth, which the poet associates with the danger of scarcity. And he worries that a future without secure reserves of futurity—a changed state that has no fuel for further change beyond it—will bring a triumph of the already given and will perpetuate its own inescapable present. For Young, such fixity amounts to soullessness, the inert ends of inert matter. His is a buccaneer's fear of having no journey to embark upon after the next one, or a colonizer's fear of running out of new lands to settle, new trade deals to strike, or new products and laborers to send back home.

As these two analogies should suggest, the aspect of *Night Thoughts* that I mean to isolate in this chapter is the interrelation between its argument for the soul's immortality and its language of expansionism and conquest. Young's most sensitive recent interpreters, Laura Brown and Suvir Kaul, have deftly analyzed his earlier poems in mercantilist and imperial terms. Both scholars focus on *Ocean: An Ode* (1728) and *Imperium Pelagi* (1729). Brown sees

these texts as contributing to a prevalent eighteenth-century understanding of the high seas: "It is a story that seeks to name and understand a powerful force by seeing it as a fluid entity, inexorable, expansive, exhilarating, and dangerous."[3] The relevant chapter of *Fables of Modernity* is particularly insightful in explaining how the last two words in Brown's list reinforce each other. The author confirms that in an age of "capitalist economic expansion," the "danger" and the "threat" of oceanic growth underwrite its thrills and its "promise" (87). The Brits, so the story goes, were made to conquer these treacherous waters. Brown quotes from *Imperium Pelagi* as she unpacks the claim that "'all Nature bends' to advance the exploitation of commerce, and, by the next step of this expansionist logic, to promote British commercial supremacy" (79). As Young's view broadens in this poem, she concludes, "human fate [becomes] a serene sea that sublimates trade into a 'traffic with the gods'" (83). Of the same work Kaul can therefore say, "This is poetry reinventing the world in mercantilist terms: nature is represented as coming to its divinely sanctioned fruition in commerce, and the flow and effect of commerce are represented in the conventional vocabulary of natural event and process."[4] Both these critics read the ocean in Young's poetry as the substrate of a nationalism that is predicated on, and that feeds back into, the growth of commercial empire. Brown furthermore takes *Ocean* to show that eternity is only a vaster stage on which these same concerns play out, "the product of an imaginative confrontation with the material forces of history" (87). In laying to rest John Sitter's

[3] Laura Brown, *Fables of Modernity: Literature and Culture in the English Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 2001), 71; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.
[4] Suvir Kaul, *Poems of Nation, Anthems of Empire: English Verse in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 2000), 204.

argument that mid-eighteenth century English poetry drew back from social and political engagement, both Brown and Kaul have revitalized the study of Young's verse.[5]

Neither critic, however, touches Young's *Night Thoughts*. No doubt the already immense text grows more imposing still with increasing historical distance, and its expressly theological purpose is to follow the forces of history as they move beyond the material. But to bracket Young's productions of the 1740s, for whatever reason, is to give undeserved support to Blanford Parker's claim that in *Night Thoughts* the poet breaks completely with his earlier self-understanding and concerns. His most famous poem might as well be the work of a different writer altogether.[6] Such a reading also finds validation in Harold Forster's biography, which tends to characterize *Night Thoughts* as a triumph against which to read Young's earlier failures, and which portrays Young's adoption of blank verse in the text as a thematic, biographical, or even psychological rupture.[7] Against this bifurcating approach, I wish to claim that Young's imperialist vision persists into *Night Thoughts*, but with some qualification. Now it is the human soul, not the British fleet, that smiles in the sun of God's particular providence. And it is the whole cosmos, not just the watery world, that must be reinvented in what Kaul describes as "mercantilist terms." Indeed, within the series of panoramic frames drawn by Young's greatest work, the earth seems but a small and short-term colony on the margins. As I approach the text I want to keep in play the worldly

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[5] See John Sitter, *Literary Loneliness in Mid-Eighteenth-Century England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1982).

[6] Blanford Parker, *The Triumph of Augustan Poetics: English Literary Culture from Butler to Johnson* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998). Parker for example calls *Night Thoughts* "the supreme *kenosis* or emptying out of the Augustan field of natural objects, and also of the tensions inherent in the heroic couplet, in which Young himself had been one of the great masters" (221).

[7] See Harold Forster, *Edward Young: The Poet of the "Night Thoughts", 1683-1765* (Alburgh: Erskine, 1986), esp. 136-37, 148, 159-60, 164, 174, and 178-80.

concerns of Brown and Kaul, then, but I want to combine them with attentiveness to Young's strenuously otherworldly aspirations and to the debates in which he wants "The Infidel Reclaim'd" to intervene.[8] Absent such attentiveness, the changes that Young's poetry does undergo in *Night Thoughts* must remain inexplicable.

Addressing the doubters of immortality, the poet doesn't hesitate to suggest that swashbuckling expansion is proper to the soul, whose capacity to range through space and time he posits as true freethinking. "On curious Travel bent," Young declares, the soul may

> dart her Flight, thro' the whole Sphere of Man;
> Of this vast Universe to make the Tour;
> In each recess of *Space*, and *Time*, at Home;
> Familiar with their Wonders; diving deep;
> And, like a Prince of boundless Int'rests There,
> Still most ambitious of the most Remote[.] (*NT*, VII.1223-30)

Ambition and curiosity being self-perpetuating, this apology for the soul's flights promises no end to flying. A few lines later in Night VII, the author returns to but sublimates the oceanic imagery elucidated by Brown and Kaul. "Eternity's vast *Ocean* lies before thee," he advises:

> Give thy Mind Sea-room; keep it wide of *Earth*,
> That Rock of Souls immortal; cut thy Cord,

[8] Some time ago John Barrell and Harriet Guest offered a potent ideological reading of *Night Thoughts*; see "On the Use of Contradiction: Economics and Morality in the Eighteenth-Century Long Poem," in *The New Eighteenth Century: Theory, Politics, English Literature*, ed. Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown (New York: Methuen, 1987), 121-43. Recent scholarship seems to admire more than extend their argument, however, and in the present chapter I'll take *Night Thoughts* to be more consistent in its (vexed) ideology than they do.

Weigh Anchor; Spread thy Sails; call ev'ry Wind;

Eye thy *Great Pole-star*: Make the Land of Life. (*NT*, VII.1267-72)[9]

The guiding star of God's heaven serves not as a destination, but as an aid for further travel. Explicitly invoking imperialist rhetoric, Young asserts that the present "is the scanty Realm of *Sense*; | The *Future*, *Reason*'s Empire unconfin'd." Reason he defines as "*Upright Stature* in the *Soul*," and uprightness as acquisitiveness for a higher condition on the scale of being: "Oh! be a *Man*; – and strive to be a GOD" (*NT*, VII.1434-35, 1441-42). Young's is a "restless Hope," as he says at one point, "for ever on the Wing" (*NT*, VII.133). His case for boundless bliss—for reading bliss as boundlessness—concludes with the declaration that "a blest Hereafter, *then*, or Hop'd, or Gain'd, | Is All; – our *Whole* of Happiness" (*NT*, VII.1471-73). I'll return later to these lines and to the nature of the paradise that Young endeavors to regain in the poem. In this context the apparent distinction between "Hop'd" and "Gain'd" dissolves into an equivalency. The poet holds, and he expects his opponents to hold, that hoping for something with sufficient passion amounts to gaining it: "Passion is Reason, Transport Temper *here*" (*NT*, IV.640). An unexpected advocate of a basically Humean argument, Young thus accepts that desire trumps understanding for most everyone: "What ardently we wish, we *soon* believe" (*NT*, VI.1311). Reading this procedure in reverse, he deduces that mortalists who believe that the soul dies with the body must on some level want it to.

He is quite willing to accept that this logic can be applied to his own argument. The apposition of hoping and gaining should recall Elizabeth Singer Rowe's acknowledgement

[9] Compare *NT*, IX.1017-48, 1659.

that her vision of the soul's future might be forged, for the sake of pleasure, rather than earned. Young, to whom Rowe dedicated her book *Friendship in Death* (1728), repeats that concession in Night VII:

> These, and a thousand Pleas uncall'd,
> All *promise*, some *ensure*, a second Scene;
> Which were it *doubtful*, would be dearer far
> Than all Things else most *certain*; were it *false*,
> What *Truth* on Earth so precious as the Lye? (*NT*, VII.632-36)

The "second Scene" legitimates and magnifies the aspirations of the otherwise scanty present. Most often Young reads desire as a testament to design: he maintains that the fact of our hunger can be taken as proof for the existence of food.[10] But here he admits that the whole structure may be no more than a house of cards. Thereafter he tries to inhabit, for almost two hundred lines, Lorenzo's alleged view that the soul will be annihilated with the body. If this bleak view were true, the poet avows, he would wonder why it had been

> "Too much for *Chaos* to permit my Mass
> A longer Stay with Essences unwrought,
> Unfashion'd, untormented into Man?" (*NT*, VII.771-73)

[10] On natural-theological arguments from design in the eighteenth century, see Colin Jager, *The Book of God: Secularization and Design in the Romantic Era* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2007). The proof from desire has proven a durable one in popular Christian apologetics. Here is C.S. Lewis working the same ground: "A man's physical hunger does not prove than man will get any bread; he may die of starvation on a raft in the Atlantic. But surely a man's hunger does prove that he comes of a race which repairs its body by eating and inhabits a world where eatable substances exist. In the same way, though I do not believe (I wish I did) that my desire for Paradise proves that I shall enjoy it, I think it a pretty good indication that such a thing exists and that some men will." *"The Weight of Glory" and Other Addresses* (1949; rpt., New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 32-33.

Returning to his own voice, Young concludes that "to *have* been, | And *not to be*, is lower than Unborn" (852-53). It's one of the few moments in all of *Night Thoughts* where the poet imagines returning to cosmic origins, and he doesn't like what he sees. Young will not accept that Lorenzo earnestly believes that the soul is destructible. Instead he returns to his own design of proving how much the libertine already relies on, already attests to, the workings of an ambitious soul.

Its longings in *Night Thoughts* align the cravings of individual people with the deepest recesses of time. The doctrine of immortality, Young says, "unites | Most distant Periods in One blest Design" (*NT*, VII.1017-18), and it stands as the hidden but "*Mighty Hinge*, on which have turn'd | All Revolutions" (*NT*, VII.1019-20). Overleaping the natural, the soul represents the pinnacle of nature, and knowledge of the soul represents the pinnacle of history. Yet just as Young claims that the soul's release from the natural is itself prepared for by nature, so he claims that the soul's escape from earthly history is part of the latter's work. Because he anticipates that new possibilities beyond the body (for all the joy they promise) may eventually be drained as well, his valorization of process forces the soul to be evermore expanding, seeking fresh sources of newness, and never at rest. The heavens declare the wonders of the market, whose resources are inexhaustible given an insatiable hunger and a changing awareness of scale. Young exults in the soul's power to expand beyond what human capacity can calculate:

> Unshortned by progression Infinite!
> Futurity for ever future! Life
> Beginning still, where Computation ends! (*NT*, VI.544-46)

Inspiration becomes necessarily self-aggrandizing, for the ambition of every listener or reader propels what Young calls, in a phrase that will be a touchstone for this chapter, a "futurity for ever future." Further objects to explore may always lie just beyond the presently visible stars. Indeed, it is through its own futural push that the wayfaring soul may realize "all that is Divine within [it]." With "*Faculties* of endless growth, | In quenchless *Passions* violent to crave," it becomes "the human soul Divine" (*NT*, VI.472-73, 617). Such powers of expansion, however, can only be wielded through being exercised, growth being the unyielding precondition for further growth, for futurity to come. The prerogatives of mercantilist imperialism extend into *Night Thoughts*, but they cannot stop there. After first analyzing the method of spiritual expansion in the poem, I will track the soul's journeys into other dimensions and the changes of scale that Young both registers and thematizes. Last, shifting attention to the soul's movement through his blank verse, I will consider the futural momentum of the poetic line in *Night Thoughts*.

THE STRUCTURE OF EXPANSION

In a delayed invocation to Night V, Young summons the aid of God the Holy Spirit, whom he depicts in two different manifestations. The second is a guide who leads the soul toward ever loftier thoughts. But the first proves identical to

> the Supreme,
> Great antemundane Father! in whose Breast
> Embrio-creation, unborn Being dwelt,
> And all its various Revolutions rowl'd
> Present, tho' future; Prior to themselves;

Whose Breath can blow it into Nought again[.] (*NT*, V. 97-102)

Committed to the priority of spirit, Young seems willing to subordinate the Father, the first person of the Trinity, to the Holy Spirit, the third person. Only after establishing the framework of an all-spiritual divinity, that is, can the poet consider God the Father's creative work. And the passage proceeds to reveal the temporal flexibility of spiritual existence as Young understands it: while gestating within the person of God, "Embrio-creation" folds together its current inchoate existence with its future life and all the changes that will characterize that life. This depiction of unmade worlds swirling within God evokes the contemporary physiological theory known as preformationism. As Denise Gigante has shown, late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century thinkers devised this theory in part to insulate Christian views of creation from purportedly threatening vitalist alternatives. Its adherents thought they could reaffirm the necessity of God by keeping at bay the contention that life is self-generating. Preformationism, as Gigante explains, "held that God had premade all forms of life at the time of the Creation, and these forms simply awaited their proper time and place in the universe to begin the process of embryonic unfolding."[11] According to the preformationists, the first products of the creation narrative recounted in the Book of Genesis carried all subsequent life inside of themselves. The work of further generation needed only generations, time for all creatures to arrive at the differentiated states planned for them from the beginning. New matter and perhaps new forms may have fanned out along the way, but for the most part, Gigante observes, "advocates of preformation considered generation a mechanical realization, by way of nutrition, of already articulated

[11] Denise Gigante, *Life: Organic Form and Romanticism* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2009), 8-9.

parts."[12] Growth like this is mechanical to the extent that nutrition only enlarges or extends the already given.

Young complicates such a scheme even as he alludes to it. His invocation in Night V presupposes a variant of *creatio ex deo*, the notion that creation emerged from the person of God instead of being forged by God out of nothing (*ex nihilo*). In Young's lines embryonic future worlds thus churn latent in God himself, not in the first of his makings, and God's heart acts as a womb.[13] Again, however, the poet of *Night Thoughts* starts from the principle that God is all spirit: Edward Young is by no means John Biddle. The poem's suggestive sketch of creation must therefore account for radical changes of condition, including the changes that intervene between life's articulation in divine spirit and its realization in worldly matter, which the preformationists (focusing exclusively on the earthly lives of creatures) needn't address. Young's spirit-minded vision of growth, that is, cannot be merely nutritive. The first of the "various Revolutions" the poet implies for unborn human beings—a primordial change of scale that sets other changes in motion—is the descent from God's spiritual "Breast" to a bodily world of matter and milk. But such language should indicate that although the poet sets himself against the materialist philosophies of the libertines and freethinkers, he comes to use the language of organic process to represent the life cycle of the supernatural soul. In this section I want to outline that trajectory, which provides the basis for Young's elaboration of futurity as expansion.

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[12] Gigante, *Life*, 9.

[13] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "embryo" (adj. B): "That is still in germ; immature, unformed, undeveloped," citing this example from Young. *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013).

Gigante notes that philosopher Nicolas Malebranche supported a strong version of preformationism that was called "preexistence," his claim being that "an individual organism needed only to increase in size, gaining new matter but not form, to realize its purpose."[14] Young's idea of "Embrio-creation" reinforces his commitment to preexistence in a much older valence of the word. Human souls dwell in God with the rest of creation, likewise in a state "prior to themselves," before they descend to earthly life. Preexistent souls might therefore be thought to abide wherever God does, while the material for their bodies-to-come (given the poet's previously quoted vision of "Essences unwrought" [*NT*, VII.772]) waits in Chaos. At least this is one way of explaining the heavenly prehistory that Young consistently posits for the soul throughout *Night Thoughts*. A few examples can suffice, the first from Night III:

> A good Man and an Angel! These between
> How thin the barrier? What divides their Fate?
> Perhaps a Moment, or perhaps a Year;
> Or if an Age, it is a moment still;
> A moment, or Eternity's forgot:
> Then Be, what once they were, who now are Gods[.] (*NT*, III.432-37)

In Night V the poet affirms the soul's desire to exist in a nobler state:

> The Soul of Man, (let Man in Homage bow
> Who names his Soul) a Native of the Skies!
> Highborn, and free, her Freedom should maintain[.] (*NT*, V.455-57)

[14] Gigante, *Life*, 11.

In Night VI Young characterizes humanity as a "Sky-born, sky-guided, sky-returning Race!" (*NT*, VI.418); describes how in the heavens the soul "breaths [*sic*] her native Air" (*NT*, VI.560-61); and lauds "minds quite conscious of their high Descent, | Their present Province, and their future Prize" (*NT*, VI.590-91). Last, in Night IX, a few hundred lines before a powerful climax, the poet repeats that "the Soul of Man was made to walk to the Skies." "Nor, as a Stranger, does she wander There," Young clarifies; "But, wonderful Herself, thro' Wonder strays; | Contemplating *their* Grandeur, finds *her own*" (*NT*, IX.1018, 1025-27). In these passages, the soul's relationship to a storehouse of future energy presupposes a disembodied past. Materiality becomes a trial by repetition, and the embodied soul longs to break out of "Life's sick, nauseous *Iteration*" by achieving a "Change" that "straitens Nature's Circle to a Line" (*NT*, III.369-70). If preexistent souls exist wherever God does, however, and if souls upon separating from their bodies return to a heavenly condition, then Young's supposedly linear vision of change does no more than describe a broader circle: life leads the soul first away from God but then, if all goes as it should, back to God.

Moments of separation mark the soul's pattern of movement. The first such rupture, a release from the divine into the life of matter, seems to propel the soul toward the second: its eventual separation from the body at death. But Young wants the soul's detached future to entail more than a mere return, more than just a repetition or extension of its heavenly preexistence. This knotty conceptual point has some bearing on the difference Young wants to make in literary history. Though to Milton he can declare, "ah cou'd I reach your Strain!" nonetheless he can also claim to reach higher than Milton does—because he sings after

Pope: "What, *now*, but Immortality can please?" (*NT*, I.450-54). In metaphysical terms, the poet of *Night Thoughts* downplays two different ideas that typically ran in parallel but that Milton and other seventeenth-century radicals had sought to synthesize: first, the traditional view that human souls belong most properly, if not necessarily, in material bodies[15]; and second, the more radical claim that human souls in the end return to the person of God.[16] The post-Restoration critique of materialism, and of the libertines who popularized it, leads thinkers like Young to conceive of matter as so static or inert that it precludes authentic transformation. From this perspective, a materialist apocalypse of the sort envisaged by Milton—God's substance somehow become "all in all"—mistakenly pulls the divine life into the cycle of perpetual repetition rather than breaking human beings free from it. Young needs a spiritual God as well as an immortal soul to divide the future from the present. But his subsequent challenge is to secure the future's difference from a heavenly past: to ensure that the soul in gaining divine powers beyond the body also maintains a discrete identity apart from God. The poet likewise hopes to justify the labor of creation by affirming that the soul gains something from its dalliances with material life.

Young responds by drawing, in between the soul's separation from God and its later flight from the corrupt body, the intermediary stages of appetite and accumulation. The immaterial soul therefore adopts a surprisingly organic rhythm: appetite for the new,

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[15] Recall from a previous chapter this summary of Aquinas's orthodox stance: "although the angelic mode of cognition is *in principle* better [. . .] it is not better *for us*. We are better off with bodies because our intellects aren't powerful enough to learn very much from the angels." Robert Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature: A Philosophical Study of "Summa Theologiae" I.a.75-89* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), 377 (emphasis in original).

[16] See Christopher Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* (1977; rpt., Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), 324-33.

accumulation of resources, and then disengagement from what remains of those resources.[17] Now it's easy to misrepresent Young's position on human appetite. Blanford Parker, for example, reads the poet as vilifying nature and locating a space of complete satisfaction beyond the confines of present comprehension.[18] No doubt Young does at times criticize worldly hunger, as in this passage from Night V:

> Absurd *Longævity!* more, more, It cries.
> More Life, more Wealth, more Trash of ev'ry Kind.
> And wherefore mad for more, when Relish fails?
> *Object*, and *Appetite*, must club for Joy;
> Shall *Folly* labour hard to mend the Bow,
> Baubles, I mean, that strike us from *without*,
> While *Nature* is relaxing ev'ry String?
> Ask *Thought* for Joy; grow rich and hoard *within*. (*NT*, V.636-43)

A few lines later, however, Young makes the overriding point that he repeats elsewhere:

> Contract the Taste immortal; learn even Now
> To relish what *alone* subsists hereafter.

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[17] Sophie Gee has claimed that "Milton's account of divine creation and the transformation from surfeit into plenitude gives Pope a set of terms for describing the work of writing in a commercial print culture." Gee posits a transformation from overabundant, disordered matter to divinely arranged and authorized matter. In turn she describes a Pope who demeaned newly market-based fluctuations of value by invoking a materialist cosmos of God-sanctioned values, a poet who thereby "attack[ed] the very world on which he depended." The historiographical drift here is from a seventeenth-century "political and theological debate about matter" ahead to an eighteenth-century "secular world of commercial writing." *Making Waste: Leftovers and the Eighteenth-Century Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2010), 79, 89, 90. Gee assumes rather than argues for a passage into secular modernity. Meanwhile Young, an eighteenth-century writer who doesn't show up in her index, seeks theological bases for a cosmos in which he thinks commerce can legitimately flourish. The waste implied by the soul's strenuous movement is one outcome.
[18] Parker, *Triumph of Augustan Poetics*, 224-26.

Divine, or *none*, henceforth your Joys for ever. (*NT*, V.646-48)

This is no call for asceticism. The problem with the kind of acquisitiveness these lines deem absurd lies not in its impulses or its procedures but rather in its objects. Young derides earthly "baubles," that is, not because hoarding is foolish but because hoarders can do better. For Young, once again taking human desire to affirm the actuality of the thing desired, the spiritual satisfactions of the next life demand that people cultivate a "Taste immortal" in this life. Material goods exist for now in the same marketplace as immaterial ones, and after human consumers satiate themselves with the former, they need the latter, Young asserts, to encounter true novelty and to foretaste the kind of joy that will obtain in the afterlife. This contention comes to underwrite the poet's project in Nights VI and VII: "O that my Song could emulate my Soul!" (*NT*, VI.71). Indeed, Young increasingly describes the poet's role as facilitating the "Taste immortal," feeling his own way and helping others feel their way beyond the body through literary experience.[19] He validates humanity's appetite as a means of hungering first through and then beyond the natural. Nonetheless, in this scheme the newness of the supernatural remains unavoidably relational: it's only in the leap upward from earthly baubles that divine joys stand out as novel. Young seems aware that "relish[ing] what *alone* subsists hereafter" is not a practice that his readers, once tutored in it, will be able to unlearn.

[19] Compare Robin Valenza's depiction of Young's romantic successors: "Wordsworth's and Coleridge's antipathy to defining the poet as a professional stems from a shared desire to locate the 'human'—that which lies outside any single profession—in poetry. This, of course, has the paradoxical result of casting poetry in the light of an industry whose special task is to create a human soul, at least for certain classes of readers." *Literature, Language, and the Rise of the Intellectual Disciplines in Britain, 1680-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009), 149.

Like orthodox theologians of his era, Young seeks, as I began this chapter by noting, to meet the libertines and freethinkers on their own ground.[20] He thus takes for granted and even applauds his interlocutor Lorenzo's yearning for new acclaim, new pleasures, and new conquests. In such longing the devotional poet sees fodder he can work with:

> Man's Heart eats all Things, and is hungry still;
> "More, more," the Glutton cries: For something New
> So rages Appetite, if man can't Mount,
> He *will* Descend[.] (*NT*, VII.122-25)

Even bodily depravity, Young suggests, can teach Lorenzo first that he craves the new and second that genuine newness must be found by rising rather than falling. Night VI closes by insisting that the natural world makes the same point. The inside promising an outside, our first presentiments of a supernatural future appear in nature's present. This argument leads the author to supplement the language of repetition with that of ascent:

> If Nature's *Revolution* speaks aloud,
> In her *Gradation*, hear her louder still.
> Look Nature thro', 'tis neat *Gradation* all.
> By what minute degrees her Scale ascends?
> Each middle Nature join'd at each Extreme,
> To that above it join'd, to that beneath. (*NT*, VI.712-17)

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[20] Isabel Rivers refers for example to Samuel Clarke, *A Discourse Concerning the Unchangeable Obligations of Natural Religion, and the Truth and Certainty of the Christian Revelation* (1706), and to Joseph Butler, *The Analogy of Religion Natural and Revealed to the Constitution and Course of Nature* (1736). See "Religion and Literature," in *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660-1780*, ed. John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005), 445-70. Another apt case, to which I refer below, is William Warburton's *The Divine Legation of Moses Demonstrated, on the Principles of a Religious Deist* (1738-41).

Almost a prehistory of the Blakean vortex, these lines fold in a third spatial dimension to show that the seeming spiral of nature actually discloses forward (if slow) progress. For Young this means that nature is a system constructed to surpass itself:

> But how preserv'd
> The Chain unbroken upward, to the realms
> Of incorporeal Life? those realms of Bliss,
> Where Death hath no dominion? (*NT*, VI.723-26)

Young locates the microcosm of his now dynamic system in the hybrid human—"half-mortal, half-immortal" (*NT*, VI.727)—who eventually sheds a material frame and attains the perfections of pure spirit. Unspoken in this vision but necessary to its operation is the insight that, along the way, the human being accumulates an experiential awareness of the difference between matter and spirit. With such awareness comes an otherwise unaccountable sense of scale.

The transition from Night VI to Night VII isolates the human being from the context of the natural order. Young extends his argument that human desire proves too capacious to be fulfilled by material objects here below: "Why starv'd, on Earth, our *Angel*-Appetites; | While *Brutal* are indulg'd their fulsome Fill?" (*NT*, VII.262-63). Having set out from the ground of human desire, and having presumed that the fact of desire vouches for objects that can gratify it, he now urges that "AMBITION's *boundless Appetite* out-speaks | The Verdict of its *Shame*" (*NT*, VII.360-61). Appetite directs the soul toward the kind of fullness available to angelic life forms. But humans, unlike Young's angels, get to test out the full range of possible satiations:

To *Love*, and *Know*, in Man

Is boundless Appetite, and boundless Pow'r;

And These demonstrate boundless Objects too. (*NT*, VII.275-77)

It's for the sake of ambition, not the forsaking of it, that human beings rise to an all-spiritual state. Young thus reframes the traditional idea that human beings fall between angels and animals on the scale of creation. In discussing William Warburton's *Divine Legation of Moses* (1738-41), J.G.A. Pocock has remarked that the English Enlightenment, which he characterizes as clerical and intellectually conservative in its orientation, pursued "a sustained polemic against ancient philosophy."[21] Edward Young is rarely figured as an Enlightenment thinker, but his poem does propose a conspicuous reassessment of Plato. In the *Republic*, the appetitive soul points downward on the scale and aligns the human with the hungering beast below. By contrast Young holds that the appetitive dimension of the soul (if viewed in the right way) points upward toward the angelic. One consequence is a flattening out of the Platonic hierarchy of the soul's parts, which is itself predicated on an isomorphism between the city and the soul. Plato compares the rational element of the soul with philosopher-kings, the spirited element with warriors, and the appetitive element with unruly masses who need controlling and who clutch after immediate gain.[22] In recuperating desire both as divine in origin ("Think not our Passions from *Corruption* sprung" [*NT*, VII.524]) and as heralding an otherworldly future, Young in effect exalts Plato's bottommost group and unsettles his

[21] J.G.A. Pocock, "Clergy and Commerce: The Conservative Enlightenment in England," in *L'età dei Lumi: Studi storici sul Settecento europeo in onore di Franco Venturi*, 2 vols. (Naples: Jovene, 1985), 1:524-62, at 553-54.

[22] See for instance Plato, *The Republic*, ed. G.R.F. Ferrari, trans. Tom Griffith (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000), 439d-440b, 441a-e, 553d, 555b-559d, 577e-578a, and 604e-606a (this last being the passage that associates the appeal of popular poetry with the unruly appetite).

highest group from a position of necessary control. The ancient philosopher sees appetite as common to humans and brutes, even worms, alike, whereas the modern religious poet makes appetite typify the immortal essence that alone distinguishes humans from brutes. On Young's revisionist account, human desire, which makes the soul clamor for new experiences, appears both deeper and wider than animal hunger.

This case for ambition reassesses what it means for hybridized humans, half-mortal only for now, to deny earthly goods. According to the discipline inculcated by Young's work, to say no to fleshly satisfactions is actually to stuff oneself with them but then to demand even more:

> The *Visible* and *Present!* are for Brutes,
> A slender Portion! and a narrow Bound!
> These, *Reason*, with an Energy divine,
> O'erleaps; and claims the *Future*, and *Unseen*;
> The Vast Unseen! the Future fathomless!
> When the great Soul buoys up to this high Point,
> Leaving gross *Nature*'s Sediments below,
> Then, and then only, *Adam*'s Offspring quits
> The Sage and Heroe, of the Fields and Woods,
> Asserts his Rank, and rises into Man.
> *This* is Ambition: this is *Human* Fire. (*NT*, VI.246-56)

The passage repurposes Books III and IV of Milton's *Paradise Regain'd*, in which the Son in his way rejects being either "Sage" or "Heroe." But that way is not Young's way: in these

lines the human being has already tried out such roles before opting to "quit" them and push past them. The energetic soul, having worked over and detached from natural resources, can claim the unending future for inspired reason and for a culture that, like the soul itself, has been enhanced by a provisional occupation of nature. Culture declares what the hungry soul has accumulated during its sojourn in the material world, and its monuments affirm the difference between body and spirit.

The "high Point" attained by Young's "great Soul" extends his reworking of Milton's brief epic. Elsewhere in Night VI, Young briefly channels the words of the ascendant soul in flight, performing the rise of the human over the brute. Then, as if recognizing that such a voyage will leave the overbodied Lorenzo behind, the poet returns to his interlocutor and offers to lift him to a different vantage point:

> Come, my *Ambitious!* let us mount together,
> (To mount *Lorenzo* never can refuse)
> And from the Clouds, where Pride delights to dwell,
> Look down on Earth. (*NT*, VI.761-4).

A libertine, Young says, is always looking to mount, and by coupling different senses of that word the poet interprets Lorenzo's sexual exploits as just one manifestation of a more general desire for power and dominance. Far from censuring such a desire, Young wants to exalt it and, from that modified viewpoint, to redeem it. From the clouds the speaker points in triumph to the fruits of human artifice and beckons Lorenzo to act upon the pride that is his birthright. The poet adopts, in short, the posture of Milton's Satan, and he lifts his charge

just as the tempter lifts the Son in the second half of *Paradise Regain'd*. Accordingly, the sequence in Night VI continues:

> What seest Thou? wond'rous Things!
>
> Terrestrial wonders, that ecclipse [*sic*] the skies.
>
> What Lengths of labour'd Lands? What loaded Seas?
>
> Loaded by man, for Pleasure, Wealth, or War:
>
> Seas, Winds, and Planets, into service brought,
>
> His Art acknowledge, and promote his Ends.
>
> Nor can th'eternal Rocks his Will withstand;
>
> What levell'd Mountains? And what lifted Vales?
>
> O'er vales, and mountains, sumptuous Cities swell,
>
> And gild our Landscape with their glittering Spires. (*NT*, VI.764-73)

Milton's hero draws a sharp contrast between sumptuousness and openness to futurity.[23] For Young, on the other hand, "glittering Spires" bespeak divine potency that in turn promises a divine future, the immortal soul's due. The conquests for which humans yearn and the mighty works that issue from that yearning attest to the crowns that are rightfully theirs. It's the same belief that Northrop Frye describes as pivotal to William Blake's thought: "All works of civilization, all the improvements and modifications of the state of nature that man has made, prove that man's creative power is literally supernatural. It is precisely because

[23] Feisal Mohamed has claimed that despite the admittedly grand style of *Paradise Lost*, Milton eschews sumptuousness on occasion for the sake of prophetic clarity: "Even in *Paradise Lost*, then, plainness seems to have a special relationship to faith: it is associated with God and with the Saint justified in his prophetic pronouncements against the iniquity with which he is surrounded"; "the plain style in Milton's handling," Mohamed concludes, "is an expression of sanctifying faith." *Milton and the Post-Secular Present: Ethics, Politics, Terrorism* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2011), 30-31.

man is superior to nature that he is so miserable in a state of nature."[24] Young attempts nothing less than a redemption of Babel. Thus he proceeds to ask Lorenzo to look from "wide Dominions" to "finer Arts": "How the tall Temples," for example, "to meet their Gods, | Ascend the skies?" Last, the speaker directs his pupil to "Kingdoms channel'd deep from shore to shore," declaring that "chang'd Creation takes its Face from Man" (*NT*, VI.777-88). Harmony and taste come to characterize the earth, and for the soul, culture's products offer a pivot from material to immaterial satisfactions. "*Sense* by Right Divine," as Young summarizes in Night VII, "ascends the Throne" (*NT*, VII.1165).

The speaker of *Night Thoughts* has been asking Lorenzo, along with his readers, to long for more. To conclude the sequence, he draws together the aspirations of the soul, the achievements of art, the triumphs of commerce, and the glories of a Protestant empire:

> Earth's disembowel'd! measur'd are the Skies!
> Stars are detected in their deep Recess!
> Creation widens! vanquish'd *Nature* yields!
> Her Secrets are extorted! *Art* prevails!
> What monument of Genius, Spirit, Pow'r? (*NT*, VI.797-801)

A reprise of the mountaintop temptation here turns into a reprise of the fallen angels' disemboweling of hell in *Paradise Lost* to construct Pandemonium, another monument to the power of occupants hailing from a higher world. Young's view from above discloses the triumph of human knowledge and culture over nature, which happily bows before its better. Along one line indicated by the passage, the poet asks his readers to perceive earth as a

[24] Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969), 41.

foreign planet and to scan for tracks left by occupants whose powers can't be accounted for by reference to the native elements alone. What has come to be called creationism embraces what would now be classified as science fiction. Humanity has successfully colonized the earth, and the British, avowed believers in the soul's origins and destiny, have in turn colonized humanity ("*Britannia*'s Voice [. . .] awes the World to peace" [*NT*, VI.792]). Yet on another line humans represent nature's crown, having emerged from within the natural order before eventually vanquishing it. Perhaps it's not too impertinent to suggest, as a way of superimposing these two interpretive lines, that Young conceives of humanity as a viral implant, placed by God in a system in order to conquer it and, conquering it, to bring it to a new stage of development. In any case, the human soul becomes the pinnacle of natural history: creation's God-instilled capacity to thrust beyond itself.

Propelled by the appetite of the soul and marked by its successive accumulations, this development keeps going. Young establishes a temporal and processual structure that does such urgent work for him that his poem never can deactivate it. That which is outside of nature comes to function as nature does in earthly life: as a pathway to realms beyond it. Once outside the material sphere, that is, the detached soul must seek new outsides, additional leaps that follow the pattern of the one from the material to the immaterial. For Young, the faithful soul that flies the constraints of matter doesn't escape the need for resources or find all of its desires fulfilled. Instead it discovers both a new order of resources and new means to deploy them:

> What *Wealth* in souls that soar, dive, range around,
> Disdaining limit, or from Place, or Time,

And hear at once, in thought extensive, hear

The almighty *Fiat*, and the *Trumpet's sound?*

Bold, on Creation's Outside walk, and view

What was, and is, and *more* than e'er shall be;

Commanding, with omnipotence of Thought,

Creations new, in Fancy's field to rise?

Souls, that can grasp whate'er the Almighty made,

And wander wild, through Things impossible! (*NT*, VI.462-71)

Young wants to see some capacity for future growth as always available. He refuses, however, to locate this storehouse of energy in a place of stable origins; he strenuously avoids calling for a return to a preexistent life in God. From an ecological standpoint, the Whig poet's vision of an unceasing drive toward newness invites catastrophic consequences: the soul in its unquenchable hunger resembles nothing so much as the acquisitive mercantilist, never in doubt that more goods are needed and primed for the taking. From a postcolonial perspective, too, the social corollaries of Young's program—allowing conquest to be pitched as religiously sanctioned commerce, primitive accumulation as discovery—remain as disturbing as they are relevant.[25] More accumulation and subsequent detachment

[25] On the interplay between conquest, commerce, and the religious idiom of benevolence, see Lynn Festa, *Sentimental Figures of Empire in Eighteenth-Century Britain and France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2006). On inspiration and accumulation, see Jordana Rosenberg, *Critical Enthusiasm: Capital Accumulation and the Transformation of Religious Passion* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011), esp. 16-17, 34, 45. Rosenberg's thesis, often more evoked than established, is that historiography in the early eighteenth century came to rely on an idea of secularization that conceptually requires but rhetorically elides the violence of capital accumulation. Though her discussion operates at too high a level of abstraction, Rosenberg forges an intriguing connection between enthusiastic experience and the reinvestment of profit back into the means of production. Related to this insight is the logic by which the achievement of newness for Young is only a state in which further newness can obtain.

are always possible given a "futurity for ever future." Even when writing poetry that transgresses the boundary between present and future, Young cannot detach the future as such from the additional temporal reserves he posits beyond it. Time for the free-ranging soul isn't empty; fullness is, rather, always just around the bend. With this relative quality of novelty comes a particularly literary appeal that, despite the undeniable brashness of Young's vision, shouldn't be neglected. Imaginative pleasure, which leads beyond the compensations of physical and material gain, derives not only from encounters with other worlds and fresh ways of perceiving, thinking, and feeling. It also derives from the ongoing process of apprehending how pleasures themselves change: registering the difference between what once delighted and what now delights, and also anticipating the difference between what satisfies now and what will satisfy in time to come.[26] It's in a notoriously long poem that Young tries to teach sublimity to readerly souls through alterations of scale.

NEW CREATIONS AND CHANGES OF SCALE

Pocock summarizes the preconditions of Whig expansionism under the aegis of enlightenment: "in Britain the ideology of enlightenment operated to support and defend the Whig regime, in which landed aristocracy joined hands with public credit and expanding commerce, and agrarian capitalism was preparing the way for industrialisation." We therefore shouldn't be surprised, the historian adds, "to find clerical exponents of political

[26] In Night IV, Young first describes how the soul will be embraced by fellow gods in the heavens and next exults in the thought of the soul's incommensurable exultations there:

> What new Births
> Of strange Adventure, foreign to the Sun,
> Where what now charms, perhaps, whate'er exists,
> Old *Time*, and fair *Creation*, are forgot? (IV.513-16)

economy who held the growth of commerce, intensifying and diversifying the relations between social beings, to be part of a providential plan for the benign government of the creation."[27] Although Edward Young shares much in common with the enthusiast and the revivalist, two of the potential threats that (on Pocock's account) allowed the Whigs to consolidate their regime, the poet's vision of detached souls released into new worlds does satisfy the demand for enlightened sociability, if in an unexpected way. Young pluralizes the idea of creation and hence expands the scope of diversification:

> What are Earth's Kingdoms, to yon boundless Orbs,
> Of human Souls, one Day, the destin'd Range?
> And what yon boundless Orbs, to Godlike Man!
> Those num'rous Worlds that throng the Firmament,
> And ask more Space in Heav'n, can rowl at large
> In Man's capacious Thought, and still leave Room
> For ampler Orbs; for new Creations, There. (*NT*, VII.1245-51)

The soul can account for numberless worlds, and Young, in a telling chiasmus, deduces that numberless worlds—and exchanges with other intelligences—are available to the soul.[28] This is the communal upshot to what might seem, in the view of a skeptic, a dangerously solitary

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[27] Pocock, "Clergy and Commerce: The Conservative Enlightenment in England," 558-59. For a more general account of eighteenth-century Britain's theorization "of society as an economy, an interlocking set of activities of production, exchange, and consumption, which form a system with its own laws and its own dynamic," see Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2004), 76.

[28] A broadly Newtonian framework may support this identification of inner and outer worlds. Anne Janowitz has been examining the literary implications of "the mathematics of both infinite and infinitesimal series that allowed for the extrapolations required for Newton's mathematic assertions that the laws of the heavens were the same laws that worked on earth." Sketching Blake's debt to Young, Janowitz also writes that "Young rebukes the diminished poetics of an orderly Universe, and exhorts us not to confuse the explanatory for the sublime." "'What a rich fund of Images is treasured up here': Poetic Commonplaces of the Sublime Universe," *Studies in Romanticism* 44 (2005): 469-92, at 470 and 491.

vision of release from the body and the material world. Recall from the last chapter the concerns of Rowe's family friends, whose letters voiced their fears about her seclusion from conversational exchange. Young has his own ways of protecting himself from the charge of ungainly enthusiasm and the corresponding allegation of coarseness. In fact the author was a sought-after companion and conversationalist,[29] and his fascination with glimpsing "new Creations" proves social rather in the way that capitalist growth is social: in quest of new products, buyers, and markets. In this section I will contend that the cosmological expectation of "an Infinite of floating Worlds" (*NT*, VI.178) underpins the mercantilist aspirations and fears of Young's poem (remembering Laura Brown's point that the aspirations are inseparable from the fears); then I'll reassess his approach to poetic scale in terms of the soul's leaps into those other worlds.

(a) "All the Sons of Reason"

Young's efforts to make the next life supersede the current one tend, as we've seen, to make the next life perpetuate the imperatives of desire on a more advanced level. His attempts to render an all-spiritual future accessible through present-day experience have much the same effect. Interactions with other rational beings still enable new experiences and states of possibility, but the poet often takes the purification of the rarified soul, as it surpasses the body and the brute, to describe the exchanges in which that soul participates.

[29] In a 1745 letter Elizabeth Montagu thus writes of having "tasted the pleasure of his conversation in its full force; his expressions all bear the stamp of novelty and his thoughts of sterling sense. [. . .] All the ladies court him, more because they hear he is a genius than that they know him to be such. I tell him I am jealous of some ladies that follow him; he says he trusts my pride will preserve me from jealousy. The Doctor is a true philosopher and sees how one vice corrects another till an animal made up of ten thousand bad qualities, by 'th' eternal art educing good from ill', grows to be a social creature, tolerable to live with." Quoted in Forster, *Edward Young*, 207.

He thus indicates that spirits in their detachment become increasingly refined social beings. The suggestion comes out clearly in a passage early in Night VI, in which Young imagines a series of bustling intergalactic marketplaces:

> how *Great*,
>
> To mingle Interests, Converse, Amities,
>
> With all the Sons of *Reason*, scatter'd wide
>
> Through habitable Space, wherever born,
>
> Howe'er endowed? To live free Citizens
>
> Of universal Nature? To lay hold
>
> By more than feeble *Faith* on the *Supreme?*
>
> To call Heaven's rich unfathomable Mines,
>
> (Mines, which support Arch-Angels in their State)
>
> Our own? To rise in Science, as in Bliss,
>
> Initiate in the Secrets of the Skies? (*NT*, VI.85-95)

"Amities" spring from perpetually renewed "Interests" and "Converse." Because "all the Sons of *Reason*" populate all the boundless skies, human longing for bright objects of perception and reflection, for high-minded discourse, and for flexible bonds of affection can lead from one horizon to the next. Sanctioned by the very structure of the cosmos, the desiring soul's liberty becomes the precondition for a heavenly cosmopolitanism. Then, in perhaps another reinterpretation of the supplies used by Milton's angels, Young proceeds to depict mastery of "Heaven's rich unfathomable Mines" as complete (because completely external) understanding of the material world. Within this dualist scheme the human being

must escape the confines of matter to divine all of matter's secrets, and once it does so its immediacy of awareness, its newly angelic intellection, will keep giving rise to fresh insights into the workings of hitherto unthinkable orders of existence.[30] This way of refitting material "Mines" as achievements of the intellect does build on the idea of exchange with other spiritual life forms, but more imperatively it abstracts the immaterial soul from the labor demanded by functioning mines on earth. Young's word "Science"—no wonder it's allied with "Bliss"—carries with it the expectation that increasing knowledge about natural resources allows for greater distance from the messiness of those resources. The initiated soul, this is to say, owns the mines; it doesn't have to work in them. Young's white-collar interplanetary marketplaces reinforce a gentlemanly ideal of natural philosophy, and the passage suggests that the soul's flight across galaxies in search of new commerce also leads away from the work of delving into the soil.[31]

To envision true industriousness and tap into to true plenitude, this poet wants to leave behind georgic modes of working and writing. Progress from land to sea is insufficient, for even the ocean perpetuates matter's cycle of cramping sameness.[32] With our present

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[30] An earlier passage undercuts any claim that Young's cosmic marketplace represents a stable eternity that stills once and for all the motions of time: "It is another Scene! another Self! | And still another, as Time rolls along," the poet exults (*NT*, IV.505-6).

[31] Young has his rightful place in Marshall Brown's "urbane sublime," with its unresolved concerns about dislocation from the soil, the *humus* or *adamah*. See *Preromanticism* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1991), 34-39.

[32] Samuel Baker has convincingly argued that British romantic writers elaborated "an intensified, second-order vision of British cultivation or culture" appropriate to "a seafaring society"; poetry in the resulting mode he dubs "the maritime georgic." "The Maritime Georgic and the Lake Poet Empire of Culture," *ELH* 75 (2008): 531-63, at 532. See also Samuel Baker, *Written on the Water: British Romanticism and the Maritime Empire of Culture* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 2010). Young falls outside the purview of Baker's inquiries, and yet this poet's career offers a critique of the project charted in them. If the romantics look to the ocean as they reinvent culture, pull away from agriculture, and escape what Baker calls "the insistent localism of classical political economy" ("Maritime Georgic," 532), then the poet of

faculties, the author maintains, we can barely conceptualize the adventures our flights will bring—hence his claims for the novelty of his *Night Thoughts*. Yet the desire to stretch humanity's limits (the readiness for what Young calls "Evolutions of surprizing Fate" [*NT*, IV.510]) characterizes so many forms of assertively British movement around mid-century: the popular cries for attack on Spanish America (and the dreams of captured Spanish treasure-ships) that spurred a British expedition to the West Indies,[33] the rise of Bristol and then Liverpool as major ports for transatlantic trade, the emergence of an itinerant Methodist revivalism, and the increasing availability of images of space that accompanied the popularization of reflecting telescopes after Newton's model.[34] Young's mobile and exchanging souls seem to fit rather neatly into a larger portrait of eighteenth-century Brits on the march.[35] For such a grouping to work, however, Britain cannot be straightforwardly identified with the earth of Young's expansionist poem, and the earth cannot be conceived of as humanity's once and future home. Rather, from the broadened perspective of the soul—which, like Moses in Midian, is an "illustrious Stranger, in this foreign Land" (*NT*, V.459)—the earth stands along a distant periphery of God's "Empire far beyond!" (*NT*, VI.662). A human being's evolution to an all-spiritual state might therefore entail a voyage to

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Ocean and *Night Thoughts* retorts that mastery of the whole earth, that glorious island, cannot dispel the claustrophobia and tedium of merely material life.

[33] See M.S. Anderson, *The War of the Austrian Succession, 1740-1748* (Longman: London, 1995), 11-20.

[34] In Night IX Young exclaims, "O for a Telescope His Throne to reach!" and then, two lines later, calls for the counsel of "Ye searching, ye *Newtonian*, Angels!" (*NT*, IX.1834, 1836). For context see Simon Schaffer, "Newtonian Angels," in *Conversations with Angels: Essays towards a History of Spiritual Communication, 1100-1700*, ed. Joad Raymond (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 90-122; and also A.D.C. Simpson, "The Beginnings of Commercial Manufacture of the Reflecting Telescope in London," *Journal for the History of Astronomy* 40 (2009): 421-66; and Jim Bennett, "The Age of Newton, Herschel and Lord Rosse," *Experimental Astronomy* 25.1-3 (2009): 33-42.

[35] In much the same vein, Marshall Brown asserts that the spirits that haunt *Night Thoughts* "are the reminders of the social bond, the universal intercourse, and the comparability of all things." *Preromanticism*, 39.

the heavenly capital. But that would spell the repetition of fixed origins, the return to God's breast, which Young's poem cannot abide. More pertinent is the hope that detachment from earthly matter allows the wayfaring soul to journey to other colonies in a forever unfolding, multidimensional empire.

Of course Young also has in mind fundamental differences between how the British advance across the globe and how the soul soars through "the vast Ocean of unbounded Space" beyond the material world (*NT*, VI.177); otherwise *Night Thoughts* couldn't tack from one dimension to another. Nevertheless, like the rhetoric of maritime expansionism, Young's language of future worlds leaps away from the soil yet betrays anxieties that are finally ecological. In a passage to which I'll return below, the author traces the promise of endless perceptual broadenings, impulsions from one horizon of understanding to the next, back to God's originary plan, which he admires for its "Fecundity Divine!" (*NT*, VI.189). The phrase recalls the ominous copiousness of the Eden God creates in *Paradise Lost*, where Eve voices concerns to Adam about the insufficiency of their labor:

> what we by day
>
> Lop overgrown, or prune, or prop, or bind,
>
> One night or two with wanton growth derides
>
> Tending to wild.[36]

J. Martin Evans has argued that the mandate to impose order on luxuriant growth while in the service of a "sovereign Planter" (*PL*, IV.691) allows for various ways of understanding Adam and Eve in an imperialist framework. At times they come across as idealized

[36] John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 1998), IX.209-12; hereafter abbreviated *PL* and cited parenthetically in the text.

indentured servants, for instance, but at other times they appear as colonized subjects who work under the assurance that they will be assimilated into the colonizing population "as the colony itself is absorbed into the homeland."[37] Such a contract for social advancement depends on Adam and Eve's custodianship of the teeming earth. For Young, however, divinely authorized generativity cannot be reduced to the self-unfolding of matter, in which he discerns perpetuation and not progress. The "Fecundity Divine" lauded in *Night Thoughts* is rather the propensity of God-inspired matter to drive unceasingly toward mind, and perhaps likewise of mind to drive toward loftier zones of spirit. One might speculatively say that Young rejects any bargain in which humans are promoted to a higher order of being but are expected, even when promoted, to keep up the work of the lower orders.

Disdaining the thought that human beings are meant to work the earth from first to last, Young conspicuously declares in Night VII that the meanest "Villager" and the "fetter'd Slave" are just as "immortal as their Lord." And the democratic potential of his outlook is rooted in the rootless longing that for Young characterizes the soul: "Souls immortal," the poet goes on, "must for ever heave | At something Great" (*NT*, VII.393-94, 398-400). The cosmic destiny here imagined for individual humans thus parts ways with Milton's unifying apocalyptic image of God "all in all." Young urges that all people, whatever their station, are by rights cosmic voyagers only provisionally bound to a baleful shore. To accept a stable place in corporeality or in nature, or even in God, is to deny the soul's true character. Once again an anti-georgic conception of work takes shape. This poetry of souls ever heaving at

[37] J. Martin Evans, *Milton's Imperial Epic: "Paradise Lost" and the Discourse of Colonialism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1996), 99. With the Fall, on Evans's reading, "Adam and Eve have transformed themselves from potential Europeans into American savages, from nature's children into natural slaves" (100).

greatness dislodges labor from the land and resituates it, as Brown observes, in "a 'pure' metaphysical realm in which rich and poor are common subjects of a higher national destiny where material are replaced by spiritual acquisitions."[38] But the poet's heady impatience for new domains furthermore presupposes that one set of acquisitions, whether here or hereafter, will only take human beings so far. Absent a claim for access to higher times and other worlds, Young can foresee nothing more than matter turning in on itself. Such a future amounts in his view to mortalism or annihilationism, belief in the destructibility of souls. In the thought experiment that (as I mentioned early on) Young undertakes in Night VII, he tries to imagine what it would mean to accept that belief, and the experiment closes with an epitaph scripted for all of humanity:

> *Here lie proud* Rationals; *The Sons of Heav'n!*
>
> *The Lords of Earth! The Property of Worms!*
>
> *Beings of Yesterday, and no To-morrow!*
>
> *Who liv'd in Terror, and in Pangs expir'd!*
>
> *All gone to rot in* Chaos[.] (*NT*, VII.837-41)

To his genuine horror, Young decides that the mortalist's trajectory leads not from dust to dust, but from Chaos back to Chaos. Not only does the poet skirt around the possibility of returning to the soul's preexistent life in God, that is. He also indicates that material life, if left to bare matter's own devices, will regress to a primal state of disorganization—perhaps the most frightening repetition of cosmic origins Young can fathom. The soul-enforced difference between dust and Chaos proves tenuous, too, and perhaps ever more Chaos,

[38] Brown, *Fables of Modernity*, 83.

manifesting less and less order or development, always lies on the far side of the Chaos we think we can comprehend. What motivates Young is the dread of *The Dunciad*, then, but in a higher key: the fear that bodies as such might check the incursions of spirit and culture, reverse the soul's temporality of expansion, and return humanity to a state in which the achievements of the human can't be distinguished from those of the worm.[39]

(b) "From Some Superior Point"

The changes of scale in *Night Thoughts* mean to exorcise or at least allay such profound anxieties. Neither early readers nor modern critics, however, have looked fondly on the apparent repetitiveness of the poem's fight against metaphysical repetition. Sitter speaks for many in our age when he guesses that the work, which retained its widespread popularity through the nineteenth century, "might be better known today had Young ended it, as he contemplated, after the fourth book."[40] A subtler contemporary response to the later and longer Nights is that of Young's friend Aaron Hill. Soon after the appearance of Night VII, Hill penned a letter to Samuel Richardson (who beginning with this release had

[39] This is partly to qualify Suvir Kaul's assertion that imperialist optimism rises unchecked in Young's mature verse. Generalizing from differences between *Ocean* and *Imperium Pelagi*, Kaul writes, "As the empire comes of age, so does this poet. If there is any self-consciousness about such a claim, it does not surface in the great wash of patriotic sound and imagery that *Imperium Pelagi* generates." *Poems of Nation*, 210. If doubts about expansionism do remain submerged in *Imperium Pelagi*, they resurface in *Night Thoughts*. The threat I'm identifying is that of return presented as unintelligibility and utter sameness. Pat Rogers proposes that "for the Augustans, the primal fear was not that things would fall apart, but that everything would somehow merge." *An Introduction to Pope* (London: Methuen, 1975), 128. The classic instance of such anxiety in *The Dunciad* is Pope's portrait of the triumph of Dulness, the end of un-creation. Yet Young's response to the specter of merger—his refusal to return to either matter or God—leads him to experiment with new literary forms, styles, and registers, all to access the change he associates with a spiritual future. For Pope, on the other hand, as Lance Bertelsen points out, "flexible and everchanging discursive practice was anathema, unless deployed in the service of essentially conservative literary parody." "Journalism, Carnival, and *Jubilate Agno*," *ELH* 59 (1992): 357-84, at 358.

[40] John Sitter, "Political, Satirical, Didactic and Lyric Poetry (II): After Pope," in *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660-1780*, ed. Richetti, 287-315, at 301.

taken over as the printer of *Night Thoughts* and had commenced his own fruitful relationship with Young), and in the letter the author laments that their mutual friend "has beauties scattered up and down in his *Complaints* that, had he not so separated them by lengths of cooling interval, had been capable of carrying into future ages such a fire as few past ones ever equalled."[41] Hill wants the heat without the cooling, but he neglects to consider that for Young the heat can't be hot without some reference to the cold. The celebration and sublimation of unquenchable appetite in *Night Thoughts* proceed only by oscillations between "fire" and "cooling interval," to use Hill's terms, or between newness and sameness, to use Young's. From the standpoint of a marketer or a literature-survey instructor, it's unquestionable that the poet went on for far too long. But the failings of Young's project can't be isolated from his attempt to valorize process—to dramatize evolving relations between cold and hot—by singing a "futurity for ever future."[42] If, with Blanford Parker, we take the poet's idea of a shift from the earthly to the spiritual to be a once-and-for-all break, a single passage from hunger into fullness, then *Night Thoughts* can find very little justification for restating that same shift in different terms time and time again. If however Young doesn't in fact cultivate such a logic of supersession—the old giving way to the new in a single stroke—and operates instead within a relational framework—newness always needing some fresh newness beyond it—then the problem of mere length turns into something else. It becomes the problem of envisioning how the soul reorients itself to a new scale each time

[41] Quoted by Forster, *Edward Young*, 202, who surmises that Hill's lament "probably reflected the general reaction" to Night VII.

[42] Coming close to a paraphrase of Aaron Hill's critique, Sitter adds that "the poem does not lend itself to anthologising." "Political, Satirical, Didactic and Lyric Poetry," 301. That recalcitrance, I am suggesting, follows from Young's relational approach: the fiery bits can't be sundered from the cold ones without losing what defines them in the soul's experience.

it arrives at a new world. For soul and poem alike, the potentially endless pattern of accumulation, expansion, and separation tends to take local shape as a rising followed by a leveling off, an arrival that in turn allows for further rising.

In his bid to reclaim the spiritually progressive momentum of history, Young doesn't ignore the dangers of entropy. Early in Night VI he observes that the theme of immortality could prompt the reader to pause and, like a closed-eyed Descartes, reflect interminably on her own soul rather than read ahead: "Long Life might lapse, Age unperceiv'd come on; | And find the Soul unsated with her Theme" (*NT*, VI.68-69). Yet the theme also disarms the threat it seems to invite by committing the thinker to ongoing perception and comparison, mental activities that, as subsequent lines reiterate, will persist throughout eternity:

> Thy *Nature*, Immortality! who knows?
> And yet who knows it not? It is but Life
> In stronger Thread of brighter Colour spun,
> And spun for ever[.] (*NT*, VI.76-79)

Rather than distracting the soul, the poem both mimes and facilitates its labors. As Young spins the idea of progress through time and the future-driven work of comparison in this way, he may pit himself against the freethinkers and deists. No doubt his contemporary Warburton does as much in *The Divine Legation*, the book Pocock names as a pillar of the conservative Enlightenment. As Justin Champion has shown, freethinking historians of the post-Restoration period, writers such as Henry Stubbe and John Toland, made pioneering excursions into the comparative study of religion and concluded that monotheism should return to the radicalism of its roots, to a reverence of nature and to "the classical idea of civil

religion."[43] According to these authors, who took up and adjusted the historical arguments of the Socinians, Anglican Christianity is the product of a long series of degradations from a pure source that may still be recovered.[44] The freethinkers had, in a word, turned history against orthodox apologetics. The broader one's historical awareness, the deeper one's distrust should be of the institutional claims of the established church. In the *Divine Legation* Warburton reacts—to distill a stunningly convoluted argument—by turning the historiography of the freethinkers against them and defending the temporally progressive character of true revelation. For the future bishop of Gloucester, only insofar as revealed Christianity represents a break from the religion of nature does it mark the origin of an authentic belief in the soul's future state. Even though Warburton tetchily dismisses the achievement of *Night Thoughts*,[45] the poem shares the theologian's designs on redeeming historical progress. Indeed Young goes further, holding out the promise of a future in which

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[43] Champion mines Socinianism "for the radical non-orthodox historical dimensions and models proposed in its polemic. In stepping outside of the Judaeo-Christian *saeculum* and appealing to other religious pasts," he continues, "Socinianism opened the door to a radical religious position epitomized in the attempt by John Toland to syncretize the claims of the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Koran in his *Nazarenus* (1718). From the Socinian and Unitarian insistence on the value of a history of monotheism developed the radical interest in other religions. Onto the investigation of the comparative structures of different religions men like Stubbe and John Toland grafted the classical idea of civil religion." J.A.I. Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken: The Church of England and its Enemies, 1660-1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992, 101.

[44] For Champion, both Stubbe and Toland were anti-clerical without being irreligious: both accepted what he calls "the Islamic conception of the sacred past," namely that "there has always been one true religion" and that "each succeeding prophet was sent by God to re-establish the true tenets of religion after it had become (almost inevitably) corrupted." *Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken*, 121.

[45] In a letter to Philip Doddridge, Warburton memorably derides Young's poem as "a dismal rhapsody, and the more dismal for being full of poetical images, all frightful, without design or method." Warburton picks up on, but similarly discounts Young's effort to propel his poem toward the future: "He appears rather to be under a poetical than a religious dilemma by the straining and heaving of his thoughts, which are so strangely affected that one would fancy he thought *album Graecum* better than an ordinary stool." Meaning to rise up in novelty, Young (on this account) stumbles down into animal dung. Quoted in Forster, *Edward Young*, 184.

there remain comparatively greater experiences, stronger threads and brighter colors, no matter how far the soul may travel.

Young knows that this program commits him to fluctuating criteria for greatness. If the thread now in my mind now is the strongest I can imagine, then a stronger thread can only be so if it modifies my conception of strength. A passage in Night IV begins to establish terms for arrival into new perceptual horizons:

> Tho' *Night* unnumber'd Worlds unfolds to view,
> Boundless Creation! what art thou? a Beam,
> A meer Effluvium of his Majesty:
> And shall an Atom of this Atom-World,
> Mutter in Dust, and Sin, the Theme of Heaven? (*NT*, IV.418-22)

Reworking the two eyes and the "beam" of Matthew 7:3,[46] Young contrasts the boundlessness of what the seer thinks he perceives with the smallness of the object as localized in his mind's eye. The precedent thought of limitlessness may appear to be confirmed by nocturnal visions, but that thought nevertheless diminishes when the earthbound act of vision is itself taken into account. What starts as the night's boundlessness contracts into a mere beam. Yet that biblical passage assumes that impediments to sight can be removed, and these lines likewise allow that the conditions for perceiving boundlessness will change. Young rewrites the imperative of the Gospel of Matthew, the call to have one's own obstructed eye cleared, as the desire to extract vision from the substrate of the eye. The

[46] "And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?" *The Bible: Authorized King James Version*, ed. Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997).

soul's ken won't always be clouded by the sinful dust. Because for Young the work of perception continues beyond the material realm, and because the soul gains in perceptual power as it moves beyond the body, the human who can already liken an individual element of the earthly body ("an Atom") with the earth itself ("this Atom-World") may come to see globes themselves as mere atoms, and to compare them in turn with atom-worlds, networks of globes, much vaster than the embodied soul could think to see. The wide world itself may then seem a speck, insignificant but still thinkable within a newly apprehended creation.

Among the most famous pronouncements in *Night Thoughts* is the claim in Night VI that human perceivers "half create the wonderous World, they see" (*NT*, VI.427). Readers conditioned by the romantics may be tempted to draw a straight line ahead to "Tintern Abbey," where Wordsworth uses Young's phrase while reasserting his love of "this green earth," both what his eye and ear "half create, | And what perceive."[47] The romantic poet finds his own powers of sense reflected and ratified, filled out, in the natural world, and in this idealizing moment the perceiver and the perceived become mutually constitutive. What such readers may miss—and what Wordsworth himself either skims by or discounts—is the different kind of work that the stressed monosyllable "half" does for Young. Elsewhere in *Night Thoughts* the poet portrays perception as a sequence of lenses, each of which at once illuminates and obscures its objects:

> The World *Material* lately seen in Shades,
>
> And in those Shades, by Fragments, only seen,

[47] William Wordsworth, "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey," in *Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems, 1797-1800*, ed. James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1992), 116-20, at lines 105-7.

And seen those Fragments by the *labouring* Eye[.] (*NT*, VI.167-69)

The eye's exertions provide access to fragments of shades of matter, its remaining contours and its meanings left to be filled in, as Locke helped to establish, by the earthly mind. By Young's lights, the soul cannot apprehend the "World *Material*" more fully by intensifying its relations to it. Instead, it has to come outside of that world, has to see it with otherworldly powers and from an otherworldly vantage. This version of a pre-Kantian mathematical sublimity works along two main lines. First, Young holds that further difference, some greater greatness, will always be available. This anxious and modern hope represents Satan's fear turned upside down, or rather right-side up: "And in the lowest deep a lower deep | Still threatening to devour me opens wide" (*PL*, IV.76-77). The superlative proves only comparative after all, a process of discovery that will not cease as long as Milton's Satan or Young's divinized soul exists. Second, Young fashions souls that continue to improve in their ability to comprehend that which differs from themselves. Such difference on Young's telling will always need to be negotiated: "[E]*ndless Age* unrolls | The Volume, (ne'er unroll'd!) of human Fate" (*NT*, VII.13-14). The writer does not, that is, prophesy a final harmonious reconciliation of all spiritual life in God. Instead, in line with Akenside, he takes the idea of the soul's ongoing evolution to imply perpetual differentiation. Such a denial of Milton's apocalyptic image of God "all in all" is central to Young's reinvention of his predecessor. Parker, despite his strong admiration for *Night Thoughts*, finds this act of appropriation unprecedented and frankly baffling: "There is in every section of the poem a submission to mystery, to infinity, to the unknowable, which Milton could not have abided. This poetic reversal has no history, and is as purely inexplicable as any greatly popular and

influential work of English."[48] To the contrary: the account of the change from the soul's destination in God or earth to its "futurity for ever future" is part of the literary history I've been recounting, a "poetic reversal" accompanying the backlash against materialism and reinforcing the cultural and ideological power of detachable souls. For Young, the mysteries of materiality that linger for now presage what human seers will be able to perceive, if not in the end, then sometime after that.

Outstripping the material world, the released soul comes to see wholes rather than halves, but it doesn't linger in satisfaction for long. It now wants a grander version of the leap from half to whole, one that consequently shrinks its prior notions of wholeness. Young ruminates on the soul's arrival at a site of enhanced perception, as well as its prospects for further enhancement, in the decisive passage I introduced earlier, the lines that end in praise for the fecundity of God's design:

> From some superior Point (where, who can tell?
> Suffice it, 'tis a Point where Gods reside)
> How shall the stranger Man's illumin'd Eye,
> In the vast Ocean of unbounded Space,
> Behold an Infinite of floating Worlds
> Divide the Crystal Waves of Ether pure,
> In endless Voyage, without Port? The *least*
> Of these disseminated Orbs, how Great?
> Great as they are, what Numbers These surpass

[48] Parker, *Triumph of Augustan Poetics*, 226.

Huge, as *Leviathan*, to that small Race,

Those twinkling Multitudes of little Life,

He swallows unperceiv'd? *Stupendous* These!

Yet what are these Stupendous to the *Whole?*

As Particles, as Atoms ill-perceiv'd;

As circulating Globules in our Veins;

So vast the Plan: Fecundity Divine! (*NT*, VI.174-189)

Infinity opens upon, or rather within, infinity. The seaborne analogy builds up from the perspective of the miniscule fish that an immense whale can swallow by the millions. Playing with the proximity of *whole* to *whale*, Young draws the Leviathan figure as a limit-case for the minnows, the greatest being conceivable, in reference to which the consumed life forms can be defined (once swallowed) as negligible components. Other whales, other "floating Worlds," can be seen or imagined from this perspective, but they stay within the referential frame structured by the whale-minnow relationship. Yet consider the possibility that the minnow could adopt the whale's perspective and inhabit its awareness of proportion. It would then experience what it's like to be a whale among whales or, if we follow Young's train of association a bit further, a planet among planets. The poet likens the attainment of this new point of view, by the human-turned-god or the minnow-turned-whale, to the progress from seeing within a globe to seeing as a globe itself sees. Not for nothing does the image of "disseminated Orbs" here evoke a swirling and distended galaxy of huge eyeballs in orbit. Young doesn't let such scaled-up vision characterize just any world in this context, however, but only the "*least*" of them. Thus the bracing futural momentum can continue.

Once a seeming whole but now a small part, the globe shares in a larger economy within which fellow globes—distant relatives now become neighbors—can refer for understanding to much greater planets or galaxies whose gravitational force makes their own agency seem minnow-like by comparison. What would it be like to see as those powers see?

No doubt the passage sublimates aspects of the language of mercantilist expansion. To test this suggestion, one might try rephrasing Young's lines by adopting the initial vantage point of a single consumer in London, where throngs of fellow creatures pack the stalls with their buying and selling. One can zoom out from here to imagine other such city-wholes of the same order but on the other side of a "vast Ocean," perhaps in China or Peru. The idea of commerce and consumption on a global scale subsequently allows each such city to be seen as less a whole than a part, less a whale than a minnow, as each one becomes only a point plotted on a massive and interconnected orb. As the reach of international trade lines up with its grasp, it may turn out that this globe itself, with its imperial Leviathans that continually swallow and grow, is but one "globule" moving inside an incomprehensibly vast interplanetary body. We along with all we understand and consume, the great world over which the nations clash, would then amount to no more than a drop of blood within a fertile and still growing cosmic frame. Once we arrive at planet-level vision, so the hope goes, we can recalibrate our perception to recognize that the global is in fact the local, just one spot among innumerable others that will become available to us.

More directly, though, the passage's phrase "circulating Globules in our Veins" leads Young back to a troubled idiom of organic growth. In a related sequence toward the end of *Night Thoughts*, the poet asks Lorenzo to hold in his mind all of "our past Nocturnal

Landschape [*sic*] wide": the range of all the future worlds Young has summoned, and the full span of all the Nights he has, to the consternation of many, accumulated (*NT*, IX.1906). Placed in quotation marks, the resulting exclamation seems to reflect the viewpoint of either collective or future humanity, or perhaps it adjoins the two. Several of these lines adapt to Young's purposes the biblical image of the vine and the branches. Rather than depict Christ as the vine and human followers as his branches, they describe God as a metaphysical vine, the basis of countless creations and their fundamental point of contact:

> "Worlds! Systems! and Creations! – And Creations,
>
> "In One agglomerated Cluster, hung,
>
> "Great VINE! on THEE: On THEE the Cluster hangs;
>
> "The filial Cluster! infinitely spread
>
> "In glowing Globes, with various Being fraught;
>
> "And drinks (Nectareous Draught!) Immortal Life." (*NT*, IX.1912-17)

From the "circulating Globules" of Night VI to the similarly fecund "glowing Globes" here, Young draws on biological analogues to the eye as he imagines interrelations within dynamic systems. That the clusters are "infinitely spread," spread presumably through what we would think of as hypothetical dimensions, confirms that the broadening of awareness and plausibility is always possible because further phenomenal objects for perception are always available. The thrills of expansion are on some level the thrills of self-consumption: the grapes drink the immortal nectar they produce.[49] But looking back to the passage from

[49] Samuel Johnson deems this image an unfortunate result of Young's sometimes inexact method: "having it dropped into his mind, that the orbs, floating in space, might be called the *cluster* of Creation, he thinks on a cluster of grapes, and says, that they all hang on the great Vine, drinking the *nectareous juice of immortal*

Night VI, this pleasure also comes from both discovering "various Being fraught" and coming to see as one's fellow ("filial") created intelligences see. An atom feels thrilled to achieve the perceptual power of an atom-world. So for Young the detachability of the soul not only allows readers to gain provisional access to future worlds and other minds. It also sets in motion what we might call a projectile subjectivity. Leaving the body, the soul pitches itself outward such that an object which previously framed its perception becomes the subject of that perception. It's as if the seed forges ahead and comes to see as the grape does, and the grape forges ahead in hopes of seeing as the branch does. Again Young relies on metaphors of organic life to foretell the supersession of organic life and the new orders beyond it. The networks and systems of worldly matter allow him to talk about how the projectile soul will first work through and then separate from them. The poet's dream of infinite realms of spirit, however, continues to need the material realm as its own basic frame of reference; and his minnows, whales, and clusters make space in *Night Thoughts* for an idea Young himself disavows: that matter has future-directed drives and longings all its own.

THE GRATIFICATIONS OF DEFERRAL

Over the course of *Night Thoughts* Young dramatizes and reflects on three different traumatic deaths that inspired the project, much of which he furthermore composed while sick and sleepless: "recurrent bouts of influenza, with the consequent loss of spirits, appetite and sleep," as his biographer remarks, "were the depressing reality that explains the long-

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Life." "Young," in *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets; with Critical Observations on Their Works*, ed. Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), IV.132-66, at 165.

drawn-out gloom of the *Night Thoughts*."[50] Yet the extensions that Forster associates with depression also synchronize with the soul's movement in the poem and, as I want to claim in this section, with its blank verse. I've been arguing that the propulsions of desire as imagined by Young don't cease when the soul detaches from one sphere of existence and rises into another. Rather than unveil a comprehensive vision all at once, a future state changes the soul's perceptual horizons by revealing that its previous accumulations were all embedded within a limited frame. Thus that frame can itself become the soul's newest accumulation, one that futurity then situates inside a new panorama, amid the play of additional, hitherto unthinkable frames. And the process goes ever on. Because desire at any given point can only be made comprehensible if it can be satisfied hereafter, there must always be an after. In its freedom the craving soul, to put the point a different way, folds together present and future. With new powers for realizing desire come both more-exquisite yearnings and prospects for their fulfillment. Young proposes as an apocalyptic destiny a home that's really a process, and a process that endlessly defers returns to home: soul back to body, culture back to material nature, and imperial periphery back to center.

Parker might seem to clarify this penchant for postponement when, in his theologically alert assessment of *Night Thoughts*, he describes Young's "calculus of failed desire." But Parker claims for the poem too tidy an opposition between present life in nature, where human desire is frustrated, and spiritual life after death, where desire is quenched. Hence his Young becomes a prophet of the *via negativa*: "'Death, only death' can resolve the questions which puzzle the spirit of man." On this (to use Parker's word)

[50] Forster, *Edward Young*, 182-83.

fideistic worldview, nothing in life can satisfy no matter how far human understanding may reach, and reaching is thus a temptation to be avoided: "Young feels anxious about an uncontrollable expansion of prospect."[51] Doubtless Parker is right that the poet subordinates the material realm to the promises vouchsafed for the soul alone. He errs, however, in maintaining that for Young death halts the motions of desire. Beyond the material body Young's poem in fact projects further yearning and expanding for the ambitious soul, whose own prospects ramify perhaps uncontrollably. Young doesn't simply repudiate nature or diametrically oppose it to spirit, in other words. Instead he gives nature one unstable place in a drama of unfolding. The natural gives way to a spiritual order that, far from providing complete satisfaction, entices the soul toward higher orders and higher-pitched desires. In opposing this interpretation of *Night Thoughts* to Parker's, I'm drawing a contrast between two psychological arcs: the soul on Parker's reading moves for now but knows in the end it will find stillness, whereas I see in the poem a soul whose motions are constrained for now but which will be progressively unbound, first through the provisional release of spiritual poetry and then throughout the never-unrolled span of futurity. Young's cosmos again becomes a multidimensional market in which unquenchable private desires may be pursued without end.

Furthermore, if Parker is right, then it is devout repetition that nudges Young as well as his reader from one line to the next through all nine Nights. The rhythm I've associated with the expansive soul—appetite, accumulation, then detachment—suggests a contrasting

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[51] Parker, *Triumph of Augustan Poetics*, 225, 224, 223. For a response that denies that Young was a fideist, see D.W. Odell, "Young's *Night Thoughts*: Christian Rationalism or Fideism?," *English Language Notes* 43.1 (2005): 48-59.

temporality for Young's blank verse. Now I don't wish to commit the poet to a rigidly programmatic mimesis whereby form always reinforces content without slippage or remainder. Still, Young is hardly indefinite about wanting to craft a poem that keeps step with the soul's own movement:

> How Great, in the wild Whirl of *Time*'s pursuits
> To stop, and pause, involv'd in a high Presage,
> Through the long Visto of a thousand Years,
> To stand contemplating our distant Selves,
> As in a magnifying Mirror seen,
> Enlarg'd, Ennobl'd, Elevate, Divine?
> To prophesy our own Futurities?
> To gaze in Thought on what all Thought transcends?
> To talk, with Fellow-Candidates, of Joys
> As far beyond Conception, as Desert,
> Ourselves the astonish'd Talkers, and the Tale! (*NT*, VI.115-25)

The most pertinent question about Young's style has to do with enjambment. It has become a critical commonplace that on this point Young departs altogether from Milton's variously drawn-out model. In evaluating *Night Thoughts*, Samuel Johnson both uncharacteristically approves of its blank verse ("This is one of the few poems in which blank verse could not be changed for rhyme but with disadvantage") and sharply distinguishes it from Miltonic or other precedents ("Neither [Young's] blank nor his rhyming lines have any resemblance to those of former writers"). Richard Bradford makes the case that Johnson could only

sanction Young's blank verse because "*Night Thoughts* came very close to being unrhymed couplets." Blanford Parker holds that "Young's blank verse generally falls further from the Miltonic tree than any other of the century." And Stephen Cornford, the poem's modern editor, despite noting that Young (like Milton) had come to depict rhyme as a "shackle" or "fetter," nonetheless concedes that "the couplet dominates in *Night Thoughts* even in its absence, and the poem's diction is often just as constrained as that of the rhyming *Paraphrase on Job*."[52] To be sure, Young lightens the load that enjambment must bear. Two brief examples can illustrate how his approach to the blank-verse line appears coordinated with the soul's progress through *Night Thoughts*.

The first case is the passage just quoted. Only two quoted lines lack end-stopping punctuation, and the first such line, ending in the word "pursuits," reads syntactically as though it closes with a comma. Here as elsewhere, Young takes into his scene the rhetorical suspensions that pattern his lines. (Cornford's scholarly edition relies on first editions but also accounts for later changes authorized either by Young or, in Nights VII, VIII, and IX, by Richardson, whom the poet trusted implicitly.) Thus the stops and pauses in the first few lines encourage the audience to emulate the soul's reflections. With his image of a long journey up a hill and his call for contemplation, the poet prepares us to be asked to look backward, to reflect on the roads that have led up to the current moment. If so, what catches the reader by surprise comes not with any motion from one line to the next, but rather the introduction, at the end of the fourth quoted line, of "distant Selves." The foregoing lines

[52] Johnson, "Young," 164, 166; Richard Bradford, *Silence and Sound: Theories of Poetics from the Eighteenth Century* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 1992), 93; Parker, *Triumph of Augustan Poetics*, 226; and Stephen Cornford, introduction to *NT*, 1-32, at 3.

having summoned a static image that stands for progress through the past, this line-ending phrase forces such an image to be rotated from the reader's past life to her future. Thus the notion of reflection changes: the reader now needs the mirror of the text to see how the distant futural image will differ from the familiar landscape portrait of the past. Subsequent lines, though, resist this suggestion by emphasizing an image-forging process over an image in itself. Indeed the singularity of the future is also resisted, "Futurities" proving multiple as well as unthinkable. Then another notable modification happens in the middle of a line: "Fellow-Candidates" turn up, adding a social dimension to an unfolding effort. Sociality has of course been necessary all along, but now the reader achieves a position to consider both a communal future life, one that can cut across species lines, and the communal work it's already begun, the work of anticipating and thus creating futurities. Only here does an instance of enjambment push the reader along: "Joys | As far beyond Conception, as Desert." Yet this movement across lines serves to prepare a condensed update about the soul's changed vision—an emerging, social, and self-aware practice of perception is now what it can glimpse—and the last quoted line validates rather than stops the process.

A second and shorter example comes from a passage I mentioned above; in it Young asserts that even the meanest villager or slave has the pride that inheres in an ambitious soul:

> And why? Because immortal as their Lord;
> And Souls immortal must for ever heave
> At something Great; the Glitter, or the Gold;
> The Praise of Mortals, or the Praise of Heav'n. (*NT*, VII.398-401)

Uncharacteristically, an instance of enjambment does seem to mimic the temporal push so significant to the poem in general. As immortality is defined as the need to "heave | At something Great," the soul lunges out from one line and ahead to the next, presumably from earth to heaven. Yet what it finds there is the sort of antithesis more familiar in Young's verse: a Choice of Hercules in which the soul must opt for either glittering vice or substantial virtue. The opposition might seem to support Parker's dichotomy between the frustrations of life and the satisfactions of death. A bit later in Night VII, however, Young reveals that his seeming binary contributes to a much larger pattern. ""Thou shalt not covet,"' says the poet,

> is a wise Command,
> But bounded to the Wealth the Sun surveys:
> Look farther, the Command stands quite revers'd,
> And Av'rice is a Virtue most divine.

Just a few lines later Young concludes:

> Whence inextinguishable Thirst of Gain?
> From inextinguishable Life in Man[.] (*NT*, VII.460-63, 467-68)

The earlier dismissal of glitter, it emerges, applies only in the limited context of the relationship between earthbound and spiritual riches. Young's ethical lesson is that covetousness points to the soul's place in a larger order. But true spiritual gold, it turns out, is not a single trove that the soul earns just by escaping the body. Like other elusive treasures, this one must be sought, and once it's found, it admits its own limitations—the

bounds of its satisfaction—and it catalyzes the insatiable soul's quest for more, and better, gains. Now that the wide world is ours, what else can we win?

The sequence from Night VII first promotes but then maligns austerity plans, with the overall passage coming to glorify the never-ending quest for unlimited abundance. Both this example and the previous one exemplify how Young's strategy for blank-verse lineation, in reining in Milton's use of enjambment, results in a different kind of futural momentum. It seems that for Young each line must at once satisfy and stoke desire. The line as such must have the self-contained wholeness we tend to associate with couplets, and yet the satisfactions it offers must prove inadequate enough to mandate more lines. Just as the delimited body gives the soul grounds from which to soar, the contained, typically end-stopped blank-verse line should cultivate a craving for new lines that reinvent the terms of the old. When they arrive, these new ones should stretch previously settled bounds of satisfaction, making the preceding lines feel no less complete but reorienting their completeness within a different framework, and this expanded framework should both mollify and amplify the reader's need for novelty. It's an astonishing theory of poetry, though one that seems to render poetic success impossible. Young can insist that all the lines he adds to *Night Thoughts* help to pull the soul's future flights to the present, but he still needs something else behind or beyond that realized futurity toward which inconstant and unappeasable desire can direct itself.

The poem is expansionist, not just expansive, in part because Young has little interest in finding new uses or valences in given materials. Contentment within the confines of the earth is for this poet another name for brutishness. Animals "graze the Turf untill'd"

and "drink the Stream | Unbrew'd," he writes in Night VI, finding rhetorical proof in the stalls:

> No foreign Clime *They* ransack for their Robes;
> Nor Brothers cite to the litigious Bar;
> Their *Good* is Good entire, unmixt, unmarr'd;
> They find a Paradise in ev'ry Field[.] (*NT*, VII.294-95, 298-301)

"A Paradise in ev'ry Field" is actually a viable motto for a tradition of intellectual labor in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries that, as Joanna Picciotto has recently argued, Milton helped to inspire. Such laborers believed that new instruments of vision could become instruments of Adamic naming and tilling, and that Eden could be reestablished on the earth.[53] These writers sought to harmonize the methods and tools of the new science with an older georgic emphasis on the land as home; in their works Adam himself becomes the honorary founder of the Royal Society. According to Young, by stark contrast, reason itself confirms that the fields of England cannot be paradisal. Besides, he cares little about returning to Eden. If a pasture, however sanctified, is the only form of blessing the future heralds, then he thinks human beings should wish for the mortalist annihilation that Milton's Adam once foresaw: "All of me then shall die" (*PL*, X.792). This trope of yearning for annihilation reappears later in Night VII, in a sequence almost exactly echoes, even as it altogether reappropriates, Adam's monologue: "Who thinks ere-long the Man shall wholly die, | Is dead already; nought but *Brute* survives" (*NT*, VII.1183-4). Unsurprisingly, Young

[53] Joanna Picciotto, *Labors of Innocence in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2010), esp. 1-187, 400-507.

takes the ascendant soul to distinguish the human from the brute that remains tied to the land.

If goodness amounts to newness, then one might think that the angels have it best. God carries in himself all possible change, and perhaps proximity to the divine "makes their fair Prospect, fairer every Hour" (*NT*, III.392). Yet *Night Thoughts* suggests otherwise. At one point in Night IV Young elects to send his praises heavenward to join those of the angels in God's court:

> If to those *conscious Stars* thy Throne around,
> Praise ever-pouring, and imbibing Bliss,
> And ask their Strain; They want it, more they want;
> Poor, their Abundance, humble their Sublime,
> Languid their Energy, their Ardour cold,
> Indebted still, their highest Rapture burns;
> Short of its Mark, Defective, tho' Divine. (*NT*, IV.430-36)

Also feeling a modern need for difference rather than repetition, the angels clutch after other songs to augment their own. White hot in their nearness to the source of all that is, the angels still pick up traces of coldness, and like Aaron Hill they clamor for the heat without the cooling. They're as high as can be but feel they could strain higher still. Young proceeds to explain that these angels are indeed "Defective," for they are not human. On the scale of being (and in the above passage spatially), the courtly angels remain stuck in one spot. His

expansionist theme is therefore upward-moving humanity's alone.[54] The work of human redemption required a god-man, and Young comes close to taunting the angels with the figure of a man-god:

> First-born of Æther! high in Fields of Light!
> View Man, to see the Glory of your God!
> Cou'd Angels envy, they had envy'd here;
> And some did envy; and the rest, tho' Gods,
> Yet still Gods *unredeem'd*, (there triumphs Man,
> Tempted to weigh the Dust against the Skies)
> They less wou'd feel, tho' more adorn, my Theme. (*NT*, IV.441-47)

Even when gazing upon the cross, Young adds, people should see their own souls:

> Who looks on that, and sees not in himself
> An awful Stranger, a Terrestrial God?
> A glorious Partner with the Deity
> In that high Attribute, immortal Life! (*NT*, IV.494-97)

Eschewing a theology of suffering, by which human worshippers can identify with the physical agonies of Christ, Young advances a theology of spiritual estrangement. In Christ they can see themselves not as humiliated bodies, but as spirits shining through the bodies in

[54] According to Daniel W. Odell, Young first "combines with the belief that certain angels fell from grace the deduction from the chain of being that only one creature may occupy a given place in the scale at one time," and next "strongly flatters man" by proposing that humans "can ascend the scale of being by occupying the places of the fallen angels." But whereas I think Young takes the exceptionalist idea of mobility further—suggesting that the human soul can range outward through endless futurities—Odell takes the poet to draw a fairly traditional moralistic conclusion: "Young proceeds to interpret the doctrine of the Redemption as a concept of salvation consisting of endless progress which the virtuous can begin in this life." "Young's *Night Thoughts* as an Answer to Pope's *Essay on Man*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 12 (1972): 481-501, at 491-92.

which they don't finally belong. Identification with the redeemer divinizes each human soul and confers on each one the pattern of the orthodox Christ's life: preexistence, incarnation, and then ascension. Pushing to its extreme the Augustinian idea of *felix culpa* as well as rewriting the Parable of the Prodigal Son, Young defines the human being as God's special creation, or rather the favored beneficiary of God's redemption, itself understood as a "Creation more Sublime" (*NT*, IV.455), and he presents the angel as envious of this latecomer. The reckless younger brother is found and feted, loved more majestically, and the older one feels justifiably neglected: he's been right here the entire time. In effect the inflationist universe of *Night Thoughts* proliferates Christs and younger brothers. Multiplicity, perhaps even a weak polytheism, appears preferable to a totalizing singularity. Young ends Night VII and "The Infidel Reclaim'd" by concluding that hope for hereafter—the promise that some grander spiritual realm always awaits, where the soul will be constrained neither to a field nor to a timeless heavenly court—is each "Man's full Cup" and "his Paradise Below!" (*NT*, VII.1471). The end deferred is the end enjoyed.

CONCLUSION

Implicit in Milton's anticipation of a "Paradise within thee, happier far" (*PL*, XII.587), is a trust in the changes that embodied souls can make and that earthly matter can, bit by bit, undergo. Like Rowe before him, Young recasts this "Paradise within thee" as a fervent and acquisitive soul whose power lies in its portability. Rowe wants the soul to attain an angelic freedom in the present, and once she grasps that liberty, she worries about having to give it up. For his part, Young needs to believe that the future holds bottomless reserves of futurity and that the change the mind experiences in breaking from matter can be

replicated, without being merely repeated, at ever ascending levels. As he persistently claims the newness of tomorrow in advance for today, he betrays anxiety that those temporal reserves will run dry. *Paradise Regain'd* closes with its hero in his mother's house, awaiting the perfections of an earthly ministry evermore to come, while "The Infidel Reclaim'd" ends in a different posture of openness, pledging that higher heavenly times are always within the soul's grasp. Now happiness means never having to stay in the present.

It's worth noting the degree to which this version of temporal flexibility differs from the version Charles Taylor uses to define the mindset of medieval Christianity: "Now higher times gather and re-order secular time. They introduce 'warps' and seeming inconsistencies in profane time-ordering. Events which were far apart in profane time could nevertheless be closely linked." Taylor goes on to provide an illustration: "Good Friday 1998 is closer in a way to the original day of the Crucifixion than mid-summer's day 1997." The liturgical calendar alters the usual pattern of time, that is, by facilitating a return to a foundational moment in Christian history. "The flow of secular time occurs," Taylor concludes, "in a multiplex vertical context, so that everything relates to more than one kind of time."[55] The temporal pleats of this context fold the Christian past into the present, but if they are multiple they are also stable. Good Friday 1999 will once again be closer to the original day of the Crucifixion than to mid-summer's day 1998, and for the same reason. The pleats also retain their stability by being communal. The same warps are said to be experientially available to all who participate in the church's time, and thus they become practiced repetitions. Young shows how the old Christian idea of temporal folds could be reconceived

[55] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 2007), 55, 57.

so as to stretch toward the future, not the past, and so as to result from the labors of an insatiable individual soul, not a set pattern of communal life. The soul can now manipulate or forge the experience of higher times. The soul is indeed the agent of pleating, folding one future after another toward its shifting present. But this frenetic activity must hold all of futurity in an asymmetrical relationship with the present, higher times demanding higher ones still, lest the relationship between the two be severed and lest the soul fall back into sameness.

Taylor likewise offers a pertinent micro-history of "the dislocation of the older, communal approach to death" in the late-medieval Christian West. Accompanying this change is the new idea that each person must face an individualized judgment—an innovation that has the effect, to use an image beloved by Young, of bending a circle into a line: "Previously, belief in a Last Judgment could be added on, as it were, to older, pre-Christian ideas of death as part of the round of life. The ultimate transformation was put off into a deeper distance, where the issue of its articulation onto our present experience of death can be left vague. The new belief in immediate individual judgment brought it up close, sometimes terrifyingly so."[56] The terror had not abated by the mid-eighteenth century. The capaciousness of a spiritual future in *Night Thoughts* helps to defer the judgment that is still associated with a return to the body. In Young's case as in Rowe's, the terror seems to unmoor itself from individual judgment as such and to latch on instead to the idea of materiality. Yet there also remains a sense in which the detached soul needs the materials it has left behind, if only to preserve its orientation and gauge its flight. No doubt this

[56] Taylor, *Secular Age*, 67, 68.

conceptual problem hovers over everything I've said about Young's ambitions in *Night Thoughts*, for to escape the world of matter is on some level to render nugatory the whole vocabulary of location.[57] Hence, perhaps, the ubiquity of process in the text: not *having left* the material world, but always *leaving* it more fully behind.

In the last of his *Night Thoughts*, Young propels the detachable soul into outer space, the beginning of its unending future. Here he offers a stirring image, a modern image, of the poet's mind departing his body to commune evermore with other minds. As a contrast to the old medieval time-consciousness, Taylor invokes the "homogeneous, empty time" that for Walter Benjamin epitomizes modernity.[58] Time on this view is an indifferent bucket. Meanwhile Young's editor deems it bizarre that European readers co-opted *Night Thoughts*, a work with such an unyielding evangelical axe to grind, as a "seminal work in a secular cult of sepulchral melancholy."[59] The complaint has merit. Still, there is a malaise in the thought that the potential opened by the soul's release commits us to heaving endlessly after new growth, markets, and colonies. There is a malaise, too, in the urgency with which Young feels he must keep filling and refreshing the waters of experience, for fear that they will otherwise become homogeneous or (to him the same thing) empty. He needs to hold at bay a future, already, of modernity's exhaustion.

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[57] Recall from the introductory chapter Isaac Watts's claim that to change its location the disembodied human soul needs only to change its mind. *Philosophical Essays on Various Subjects* (London: R. Ford and R. Hett, 1733), 174-5.
[58] Taylor, *Secular Age*, 54.
[59] Cornford, introduction to *NT*, 17.

Chapter Four: Akenside's Ascent to Difference

Though little read today, the Whig poet and physician Mark Akenside achieved an early and relatively durable fame with *The Pleasures of Imagination* (1744), a philosophical poem that aspires to theorize the imagination as a faculty that depends on mysterious connections between the powers of mind and the world of "matter and motion."[1] This description should begin to suggest some of the challenges facing an aesthetic theory that presumes an immaterial mind contingently occupying an earthly body. Akenside extends as well as complicates the anti-materialist project I've been detailing. In this chapter I will reconsider his poem in the context of his other early writings, especially a philosophical essay on the immaterial world. I'll make the case that he imagines species as microcosms of the systems in which they appear. Akenside wants to think of species and systems alike as flexible. (*Species* for him can generally mean *kind* or *class*, no doubt, but he often uses the term in ways that today's readers would call specifically biological.) In the case of humankind, he stipulates that such flexibility requires the strenuous activity of free individuals. At the vanguard of the human species, broadening the set of possibilities that define human life, are exceptional souls. The poet-figure for Akenside becomes the type of this exceptional soul, whose exceptionality lies largely in her rare perceptive power. As I'll claim in the second half of the chapter, though, Akenside can't resolve the question of what the poet's special perception

[1] Mark Akenside, "The Design," in *The Pleasures of Imagination. A Poem. In Three Books* (London: R. Dodsley, 1744), 5-7, at 5. Further citations of the "Design" appear parenthetically in the text by page number. I refer to this first edition in discussing both the "Design" and the text of the poem, but much of the material I'll consider in the present chapter remains unchanged in the 1754 edition that Robin Dix uses as a copytext in his modern scholarly edition: see *The Poetical Works of Mark Akenside*, ed. Robin Dix (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 1996), 85-174.

entails, relative to the system in which it functions. To this question Akenside has two disparate answers, and I'll treat them one by one. Either way, he envisions the exceptional poetic soul as pushing forward into the difference futurity brings, never quite at home in the present.

Akenside holds that the future promises development in the form of differentiation. In the same year that *The Pleasures of Imagination* was published, he completed his MD thesis on embryology at Leiden University, which had long been the institutional home, as Robin Dix points out, of Hermann Boerhaave, "an eminent preformationist." Dix notes that the thesis reflected its author's chutzpah. Basing its claims on William Harvey's *Exercitationes de Generatione Animailium* (1651), the project "advanced an epigenetic theory of conception" and attacked the widely accepted theory of preformationism, the theory of Boerhaave and his students, which "envisaged the seeds of all living things as containing miniature versions of their descendants." The preformationists, that is, held that reproduction "consisted in the growth [. . .] of a being already in existence."[2] G.R. Potter succinctly summarizes Akenside's frustration with this prevailing view of development: "there could be no effect whatsoever from the environment producing a change—everything would necessarily have been settled at the beginning of time." But Potter also reveals that, from the perspective of modern science, Akenside overcompensated in his reaction. His thesis, for instance, contends that "spermatozoa do not have any function in fertilization" and "maintains that divine influence

[2] Robin Dix, *The Literary Career of Mark Akenside, Including an Edition of His Non-Medical Prose* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 2006), 119.

enters into the process."[3] To put the point in more dramatic terms: if the alternative is that all possible variations of life were set at the beginning, Akenside would rather deem every conception immaculate, specially activated by the creator. The Whig poet demands the genuinely new, as opposed to the merely preformed, and to satisfy this demand he posits an interventionist God whose labors of creation never cease. As I'll discuss in the following section, the notion that new forms of life keep being created supports the poet's larger claim that existing creatures may rise to new levels of development, ascending on the scale of being. This process is what allows for never-ending enhancement and diversification. The related question I'll be posing as I explore Akenside's early poetry is whether the immaterial mind must get outside of its place in the story of differentiation in order to tell that story aright.

The tale starts to take shape in Akenside's "Hymn to Science" (1739), one of several poems Akenside placed in *The Gentleman's Magazine*. In the opening stanza the poet summons Science, using the concept, as Dix's explanatory note observes, "in its broadest sense, to mean all knowledge."[4] Next the poet asks Science to dispel all the "mimic shades of thee," including "the scholiast's learning" and "the visionary bigot's rant."[5] To be possessed by wisdom's "powerful charms" (13), Akenside implies, is to participate in a nobler and more capacious enthusiasm, one that doesn't use inspiration as a cover for exclusion. Soon the

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[3] George Reuben Potter, "Mark Akenside, Prophet of Evolution," *Modern Philology* 24 (1926-27): 55-64, at 62, 63. Not least because Akenside's theory requires divine involvement, A.O. Aldridge rejects the idea that the poet was a proto-evolutionary thinker. See Alfred Owen Aldridge, "The Sources of Mark Akenside's *The Pleasures of Imagination*" (Ph.D. diss., Duke Univ., 1942), 154-64; discussed in Dix, *Literary Career*, 101, 105.

[4] Dix, *Poetical Works of Mark Akenside*, 520.

[5] Mark Akenside, "Hymn to Science," in *Poetical Works*, ed. Dix, 406-8, at lines 9-11; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text by line numbers.

poet, resembling Adam before Raphael, asks leave to know "each secret cause"; and setting out from "number's, figure's, motion's laws" he begins to comprehend the wider "globe" and the "sky" (19-23). Having attained this new range of vision, the poet's mind can begin to understand its own workings:

> The busy, restless, human mind
>
> Thro' ev'ry maze pursue;
>
> Detect Perception where it lies,
>
> Catch the ideas as they rise,
>
> And all their changes view. (26-30)

Wisdom becomes inspired perception of perception itself, and its remit is not merely objects and ideas as they are. Now the mind can trace secret causes from their effects back through their prior changes. In an "Eternity" of time and "infinity of space" the poet finds validation for the ambition of human beings who audaciously "strain to grasp THE WHOLE" (34-36). Boundlessness is what such insatiable minds want to trace, but that boundlessness lies as much within as without. The poet therefore asks for a history of consciousness and its hunger: the story that lies behind "the vast, ambitious thoughts of man, | Which range beyond controul" (32-33). Shortly thereafter, the "soul" of the poet is "launch[ed] thro' Being's wide extent." With "just ascent" it climbs "the fair scale" of being, proceeding upward "from the dead, corporeal mass, | Thro' each progressive order" and finally to God (41-48). What evidently starts out as a backward-moving journey to mind's origins also enacts what Akenside (as we'll see) believes the future can bring: "progressive" movement

from lumbering materiality to ever livelier realms of spirit. At this stage of the poem, rising and returning figure as indistinguishable movements toward God.

At "GOD," however, the poet says he must stop. "There, *Science*! veil thy daring eye," the subsequent stanza begins; "Nor dive too deep, nor soar too high, | In that divine abyss" (48-51). A return to divine origins means a plunge back into the undifferentiated and unknowable abyss. The bosom of God incites dread, perhaps the fear of un-creation. Having been exalted to the realm of pure spirit, the singer asks Science to yield to the directives of religious faith: "To Faith content thy beams to lend, | Her hopes t' assure" (52-53). Inspired wisdom should support faith, but it must also defer to it. The flight of the soul and the purview of knowledge can lead all the way here but not further. Replicating the up-then-down pivot of *Paradise Regain'd*, which after reaching the height of metaphysics turns back to the realm of earthbound practice, the "Hymn to Science" returns from the heavens to the space of social engagement. Says the speaker to his own mind:

> Then downwards take thy flight agen,
> Mix with the policies of men,
> And social nature's ties. (55-57)

Like Rowe, the poet accepts that his descent to earth is a precondition he must meet if his heavenly hymn will effect change in social or political life. In a new twist, though, Akenside adds that the passage through "each progressive order" up to God can be adapted downward so as to enrich earthly knowledge. The point isn't only that the mind, having ascended to the heavens, can easily learn the lessons the earth has to teach. The mind can also perceive more clearly the distinctions among the disciplines that organize humane study.

Over the next several stanzas, the poem takes in the study of politics and political economy (58-60), philosophical ethics (61-66), and finally practical ethics (67-72)—control over one's own passions being deemed the "best effort of [Science's] skill" (67). Such movement through disciplinary divisions starts from a global perspective, which the mind can have by virtue of its distance from localized matter, and then contracts to the scale of a single subject, as though the soul's return voyage to the body allows for a newfound mastery over its action. The categories of human wisdom become clear only after the soul turns back from the divine abyss. Having asked for a history of human consciousness, the poet in the hymn gets instead an education, or at least a syllabus, for earthly action.[6]

Akenside indicates that the experience of climbing beyond materiality brings a keener awareness of the distinctions that make worldly wisdom comprehensible. By drawing the resources of a spiritualized condition back to the present and putting them into practice, the mind allows human life to climb in a different sense. The poet goes on to reveal that prospects for social and political development are gifts given to humanity by Science:

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[6] Karina Williamson provides a telling survey of the courses available to Akenside when he was a university student at Edinburgh, during which time he published the "Hymn to Science." Among these offerings were lectures by John Pringle, then a professor of pneumatics and moral philosophy. Williamson quotes from a report in the *Scots Magazine* as she describes his lectures: "Pringle's course on 'Pneumatics' comprised inquiries into the nature of 'material substances . . . imperceptible to the senses'; of 'immaterial substances connected with matter, in which is demonstrated, by natural evidence, the immortality of the human soul'; of 'immaterial created beings not connected with matter'; and 'Natural Theology; or, the existence and attributes of God demonstrated from the light of nature.' No texts were specified, but [Robert] Boyle was doubtless a major authority here." "Akenside and the 'Lamp of Science,'" in *Mark Akenside: A Reassessment*, ed. Robin Dix (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 2000), 51-82, at 56. Like Akenside, Pringle (1707-1782) had ties to Leiden, having studied under Hermann Boerhaave and earned the MD degree there in 1730. He later gained renown as a military physician, retiring from his Edinburgh post in 1744 to become physician-general to the British army. Pringle went on to publish his groundbreaking *Observations on the Diseases of the Army* (1752) and to be named physician to the queen (1761), president of the Royal Society (1772), and physician-in-ordinary to the king (1774). See J. S. G. Blair, "Pringle, Sir John, first baronet (1707–1782)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, October 2007.

Of wealth, pow'r, freedom, thou! the cause;

Foundress of order, cities, laws,

Of arts inventress, thou! (85-87)

Inspired wisdom allows cities to be erected, culture to be fostered, and wealth and freedom to be disseminated. It also allows the exceptional mind (the one attuned to the giver of these gifts) to be "raise[d] above the vulgar's breath" and "all in life that's mean" (73, 75). This vision of human progress keeps in play a literal understanding of refinement: evolution from matter to spirit. Rebuffed from the seat of God, the mind returns to earth to apply the wisdom it has gleaned from the non-present, whether the distant past or the rarefied future. Such a soul can begin to actualize these other times and their possibilities here and now, its journeys enabling civilization to make new advances. As it puts its heaven-shaped powers to practical use on earth, though, the mind chafes as it comes up against bodily limits, which Akenside (a staunch Whig but by no means a populist) associates with the vulgar masses. The advanced soul yearns for another ascent.

Armed with new confidence, the speaker seems ready to clear away all limits at the end, including the one that imposed a change of direction at the text's midpoint. In a final paean to Science, he exclaims: "Sun of the soul! thy beams unveil!" (91). He prays that Science will allow him to escape "the vain tumult" and "sit in peace with Thee" (95-96). Especially potent is the contrast between the soul's caution when speaking to Science at the middle of the hymn—"veil thy daring eye"—and its unabashed adventurousness—"unveil!"—at the end. Karina Williamson has briefly compared Akenside's treatment of wisdom in this hymn with his approach in *The Pleasures of Imagination*. "Conspicuously absent"

from the latter, she writes, "is the warning against trespass issued in the 'Hymn to Science.' Akenside has moved on from the Popean respect for the universe as a mighty maze, planned but impenetrable, that he showed in the earlier poem."[7] But Akenside begins moving past deference to the universe's secrets and structures even by the time the "Hymn to Science" draws to a close. His final lines show a mind itching to revisit the earlier moment when, disbarred from further flight, it asked Science to cover its eyes. By the poem's end, Science needn't veil its eyes before God: now it can unveil what God sees. Akenside works through his fear of the divine abyss, that is, by reinventing divine knowledge. No longer does he strive for an impossible and threatening knowledge *of* God. Rather, he directs his energy and brash optimism toward the desire to seek understanding *as* God, understanding that's available from a divine vantage upon creation. This distinction divides the motion of return, backward to the abyss of origins, from the motion of ascent, upward and futureward to ever new perspectives.

I'll suggest in this chapter that the resulting emphasis on ascent squares with Akenside's rejection of preformationism, according to which God solved the problem of development at the outset by installing all created life, with all its possible changes, inside earth's first creatures. Akenside summons a future that does more than draw out what has been latent all along. In the next section, I'll home in on an essay that shows how he redefines continual creation and associates futural momentum with ascent up the scale of being. Meaning to overcome the preformationist thinking still dominant at Leiden, Akenside stakes his claims for an activist God and the flexibility of species, both of which underlie his

[7] Williamson, "Akenside and the 'Lamp of Science,'" 60-61.

vision of ceaseless diversification. Akenside holds fast to individual agency, however. As early as the "Hymn to Science," he suggests that new vantage points on the present—outside the present—are necessary for genuine change, and he credits this expanded perception to the efforts of exceptional minds, poet-figures. But because systems are flexible and interlinking, he also acknowledges that a new perceptual angle on the present can't come from a place beyond all systems. As a result, his portrait of the poetic soul at the edge of possibility, pushing past existing limits, raises the question of how that mind is able to see in a new way. Poetic perception becomes a theoretical problem Akenside must confront. Far from a narrow concern, this challenge reflects his struggle to explain how active minds can remake the world. Two sections on *The Pleasures of Imagination* address his different responses to the problem. Perception for Akenside typically depends on the perceiver's position on a dynamic scale of being. In the third section, I'll examine moments which show that the inspired mind's mysterious ties to matter provide the basis for exceptional insight. Perhaps the poet still needs these ties to see the present afresh. In the section after that, though, I'll explore passages in which the inspired mind breaks free from such charms and looks upon earthly creation from a higher place (presumably a higher system). Perhaps it's by escaping the realm of matter that the poet can see it anew. Akenside at last appears to call up what he cannot pull off: a synthesis between these two accounts of poetic seeing. Yet even that ostensible failure affirms, and perhaps contributes to, a future that offers endless stores of difference.

PRINCIPLES OF PROLIFERATION

Around fifteen years ago, Richard Allen identified Akenside as the author of an essay that was signed "M.A." and published in compendium titled *The History of the Works of the Learned*.[8] Accepting this attribution as indisputable, Robin Dix adds that "The Principles of a Theory of the Immaterial World" (1742) attests to Akenside's "theological open-mindedness" and exposes some of the poet's foremost concerns in the period "when work was going forward apace on *The Pleasures of Imagination*."[9] A relatively short but notably dense piece of prose, the essay is organized into twenty-three numbered propositions, which range in length from terse single sentences to more elaborate paragraphs that take up twenty-five lines of text in Dix's modern edition.[10] "It is above all in the dynamism of Akenside's scheme," as Dix declares, "that the theological interest [of the essay] lies."[11] Dix's treatment remains an unsurpassable starting point for assessing the relevance of the "Immaterial World" essay to *The Pleasures of Imagination*. But his discussion of the essay rests content with presenting Akenside as an idiosyncratic outlier or singular innovator instead of, as I am maintaining, a contributor to a significant pattern in Whig poetry of the early eighteenth century. Indeed, some of the author's propositions in the essay might serve as useful glosses for the theologically informed poetry of Rowe and Young. Like these forerunners, Akenside describes transformation as owing to minds that can reach other times, other spheres of possibility, because they can break from the materiality of the present.

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[8] See Richard C. Allen, "A Philosophical Essay by Mark Akenside," *Notes and Queries*, n.s., 45 (1998): 464-65.
[9] Dix, *Literary Career*, 99, 106.
[10] See M[ark] A[kenside], "The Principles of a Theory of the Immaterial World," appendix 1 in Dix, *Literary Career*, 257-62; hereafter abbreviated "IW" and cited parenthetically in the text by page numbers.
[11] Dix, *Literary Career*, 101.

The first of Akenside's propositions states that contemplation of "the abstract Reasons of Things" and the "natural and moral World" supplies sufficient proof of "an infinite Mind who created, and who governs the universe" ("IW," 257). Later propositions disclose that these two actions, creation and governance, are actually one. Akenside begins proposition III with the claim that "there was never any Time in which nothing existed, save God alone" ("IW," 257). Now this assertion could be just a syntactically contorted rephrasing of the traditional view that God has always existed. Yet it could also gesture to the more surprising case that the divine creator shouldn't be thought of as ever having existed in isolation. Wanting to discount the assertion that God in his freedom might have chosen not to create anything, Akenside first takes it as given that God is good; then, after implying that the characteristic feature of divine goodness is creativity or generativity, he determines that God must always be, and must always have been, creating. At no point can the maker not be making. Such a reading of Akenside's claim is corroborated by the next statement in proposition III: "The perfect and self-existent Intelligence did not pass an eternal Duration without doing Good" ("IW," 257). Even if we can hypothetically isolate a period in God's life before he formed our universe, advises Akenside, we must not imagine that the deity was idle during that stretch. When God wasn't at work shaping our universe, he must have been busy forging others. This account of an indefatigable divine creator continues in proposition IV, which invokes the doctrine of continual creation: "All created Beings, Material and Immaterial, depend, for the Continuation of their Existence, upon the vital Energy of the Deity constantly exerted" ("IW," 257). On its surface this argument resembles the Cartesian case (first published in Latin almost exactly a hundred years before

Akenside's essay appeared in print) that "the distinction between preservation and creation is only a conceptual one." According to Descartes, who extends a long theological tradition, "it does not follow from the fact that I existed a little while ago that I must exist now, unless there is some cause which as it were creates me afresh at this moment—that is, which preserves me."[12] Notice, however, that on Descartes's view God must exert himself at every moment just for the sake of the status quo: to keep every existing something from sliding back into the chasm of nothingness. Akenside by contrast envisages an energetic and activist God who keeps making additional creatures and thereby grants existing ones the freedom to change condition.

In a series of claims later in the essay, the writer uses the progress of the human soul as an illustration of a larger pattern of ascent. Akenside builds toward the speculative contention that from the standpoint of the immaterial world, "all Orders of Being are continually tending to a higher State" ("IW," 260). He thus unsettles the "static plan of nature" that historian Peter Bowler discerns in typical eighteenth-century treatments of the chain of being: "a highly structured system in which every species had an unambiguous position."[13] In support of this summary Bowler quotes lines from Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man* (1733-34), including Pope's brief for the stability of the chain:

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[12] René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, in *Philosophical Writings*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984-85), 2:33. For a controversial recent account of divine re-creation in Descartes's thought, see Peter Machamer and J.E. McGuire, *Descartes's Changing Mind* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2009).

[13] Peter J. Bowler, *Evolution: The History of an Idea*, 3rd rev. ed. (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2003), 63. Bowler concedes that a few thinkers allowed for "the injection of a time element into an originally static plan," though he insists that the results still were more fixed than open-ended (66). On the "temporalization" of the chain, he refers to A.O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1936), 246. See also Daniel W. Odell, "Young's *Night Thoughts* as an Answer to Pope's *Essay on Man*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 12 (1972): 481-501, at 491-92. Robin Dix

On superior pow'rs

Were we to press, inferior might on ours:

Or in the full creation leave a void,

Where, one step broken, the great scale's dest[r]oy'd.[14]

Akenside rejects the immutability that's a necessary feature of this scheme, and he later attends to Pope's concern about voids. But the Whig writer starts from the more fundamental thesis that the faculties of the "most elevated Creatures," being finite by design, "may go on for ever in a State of Improvement." Akenside then adds a premise that is emphatically shared by the other Whig writers I've considered: "Matter is incapable of Perception, Appetite, or a self-moving Power." From these two postulates he draws, in proposition XVII, a familiar conclusion: "We have here a sufficient Proof, that the human Soul will exist hereafter in a higher State, and with more exalted Faculties, than at present it enjoys" ("IW," 260). Humans are the most exalted beings in material creation, and yet their faculties will continue to advance. For that to happen, their souls must gain enhanced perceptual and cognitive powers and they must shed the frame of inert matter, which is a drag on their potential ascent because it has no power of its own to move or to effect change. Matter as such evokes fixity and ponderousness. Thus far these views line up neatly with those of Rowe and Young. In the next proposition, however, Akenside makes an explosive point as though in passing: "Almost all the Arguments which prove the human

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likewise defers to Lovejoy in summarizing Akenside's contribution and presenting it as an intriguing outlier: "Akenside's introduction of a progressive element into the common theme of the Chain of Being remains an interesting and significant development, as A.O. Lovejoy showed in his classic study of the concept." Dix, *Literary Career*, 101.

[14] Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man*, in *Poems: A Reduced Version of the Twickenham Text*, ed. John Butt (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1963), I.241-44. Bowler opts to quote from the *Works of Alexander Pope* (1751).

Mind to be immortal, prove also the Immortality of every Animal" ("IW," 260). Without elaborating any further, he broadens the scope of arguments for the immortality of the human soul, pronouncing that they in fact encompass the minds of other creatures that sit relatively high on the scale of being.[15] No longer is *soul* straightforwardly synonymous with *mind*. Now the framework of the immaterial world allows the former category (the human) to open itself up to the latter (the animal). Once he returns to the problem of the voids or vacuums raised by Pope, it furthermore becomes clear that Akenside at least theoretically extends to all created life forms the promise that his fellow Whig poets afforded only to human beings: the prospect of rising to an all-spiritual state.

The process of ascending to new powers, proposition XIX notes, is unpredictable. We can't know what the specific results will be for any given soul, and yet by observing other humans we already have evidence "that considerable Degrees both of moral and intellectual Excellence may be unfolded, as it were, and drawn out from a Being, which, a very few Years before, gave no Indication of its Capacity for such Attainments" ("IW," 260). Extending his portrait of a world in which the future—not the settled past—brings surprising newness, Akenside proceeds to reflect on the consequences of ascent for the rest of creation. His descriptions in these propositions shift from individual souls or animals to groups of them, and Akenside comes back to the idea of God's unrelenting activity: "When

[15] Thinking about similarly self-assured analogues, Dix mentions the seventeenth-century Leveller Richard Overton, whose belief in the resurrection of animals coexisted with his mortalism, and Matthew Henry, "a Dissenter whose commentary on the Bible Akenside may have known from his childhood attendance at Newcastle's Hanover Square meetinghouse." Dix, *Literary Career*, 103. As Dix explains, Henry takes Romans 8:21—"the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God"—to attest that all created beings, not just humans, will rise in glory at the end of time. *The Bible: Authorized King James Version*, ed. Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997).

any Species of Creatures quits its Station in the Universe, for one more elevated, the Vacancy may be filled up, either by an immediate Creation of a Being fit for that State, or by extending the Powers of an inferior one, till it be capable of filling it" ("IW," 260). Here Akenside answers Pope's charge that any modifications to the scale of being would render it discontinuous and thereby shatter it. Dix offers a synopsis of the essay's solution to this problem: "God is seen in his continuous loving-kindness as causing each link in the chain to raise itself in time to the level of the link above it, simultaneously creating afresh new creatures to prevent the emergence of a vacuum."[16] Akenside's God is indeed a god of the gaps, allowing space to emerge in between different clusters of beings that may then be filled in with other creatures either rising or newly formed.

Having addressed general doubts about movement on the scale, Akenside responds for the remainder of proposition XX to a more specific counterargument, namely that only humans have the power to ascend. He develops his earlier point about the immortality of animals by suggesting that other created beings get to participate in the dynamism that inheres in souls: "is it not far more natural to suppose, that each Species shall be raised successively, and in Order, than that one Species of Creatures shall be rising continually, while all below it, tho' equally immortal, are kept at a Stand?" ("IW," 260). Akenside undercuts the notion that all other creatures are mere stage props that adorn the performance of humanity's rise. On his account ascent requires immaterial souls, and his tentative but volatile suggestion is that other created life forms will gain them in time. Akenside thus comes unexpectedly close to the Lucretian argument of the day's materialists,

[16] Dix, *Literary Career*, 101.

that "consciousness is a higher-order property that somehow emerges out of the activity of lower-order, senseless atoms."[17] From the perspective of Akenside, however, this materialist understanding of emergence gives matter too much credit. He insists by contrast that matter is inert and that the process by which animals attain minds is the work of an immaterial world. The details are hazy, to say the least, but the general picture is of spirit enticing matter slowly toward itself. Over time more and more creatures, assuming they labor as best they can, will win access to the realm of spirit. An immaterial God is every moment remaking the material world, and creatures both contribute to and benefit from this endless drawing out of the act of divine creation.

Akenside accordingly summarizes his theory at the beginning of proposition XXI: "The general Constitution of the Immaterial World seems then to be this: All Orders of Being are continually tending to a higher State, each inferior Order succeeding to the Vacancy occasioned by the Removal of the next above" ("IW," 260). A bit later he interpolates lines "taken," he says, "from a Poem not yet printed," and the quoted verses conclude with the same emphasis on rising as a collective action:

> in their Stations, all may persevere
> To climb th' Ascent of Being, and approach
> For ever nearer to the Life Divine. ("IW," 261)

As Allen first established when attributing the essay to Akenside, and as Dix details in his study, these lines later reappeared in book two of *The Pleasures of Imagination*.[18]

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[17] Jonathan Kramnick, *Actions and Objects from Hobbes to Richardson* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2010), 67.
[18] Allen, "A Philosophical Essay by Mark Akenside"; and Dix, *Literary Career*, 99-106.

Yet Dix also notices that progress for Akenside is never passive or automatic, for the poet won't cede individual free will to the imperatives of a governing system: "The creatures who climb the scale of being do so through their own efforts, assisted by God's benevolence."[19] Whereas later statements in the essay might indicate that God lifts the entire scale in his own power (and does so by regular intervals), proposition V insists that each immaterial mind has volition, which Akenside goes so far as to call "the only contingent Existence in Nature" ("IW," 257). In his final proposition, moreover, he hazards the argument that the soul's free will persists into the afterlife, the speculative conclusion being that repentance and resulting happiness remain available even to the damned ("IW," 261-62). Retaining their agency, individual minds that desire to rise can always do so, but they must be as strenuously active as their creator in exercising that freedom. The ambivalence between such personalized ascent and a more communal understanding of ascent is never quite resolved in Akenside's essay, and it intensifies into a fraught opposition at the beginning of proposition XXII: "This continual Progress of Nature is *carried on either* by the Ascent of particular Animals, or Species, independently of the other Species they were connected with, *or else by* an Ascent of a whole System together; each particular Animal always keeping its Station relatively to the System" ("IW," 261, emphasis added). The second option, the possibility of uniform progress, almost seems a capitulation to Pope's complaint. It promotes a scale that isn't static—creatures do ascend to different stations—and yet it cushions uncertainty by proposing that all creatures move in the same way and at the same pace, thereby keeping the same position relative to the beings above and below them. While

[19] Dix, *Literary Career*, 127.

Akenside feels he must tentatively allow for this possibility, I suspect he sees it as too mechanistic to sustain his commitment to the immaterial mind's freedom. This scheme, not unlike the preformationist theory of development, seems to render all change predetermined and altogether predictable, preformatted from the start.

Another possibility, the first one he mentions in the sentence I just quoted, is a more scattered conception of progress that presupposes some deviation from type within the same class of beings. If the entire chain is not raised, "with each creature remaining where it was in terms of its relations to all the others,"[20] then individuals may rise at their own pace and groupings of creatures may turn out to be flexible. Reflecting on this prospect leads the author toward a heterodox theological view to which, as I've shown, other Whig poets also found themselves assenting. "If the first of these Opinions be admitted," Akenside concedes, "the Pre-existence of the human Soul is a necessary Consequence." If improvement is always possible and if climbing the scale is a labor carried out by individual persons, the author can see no way around the further claim that each soul is on a distinctive trajectory that began long before its installment into a present body. Presumably he thinks that God must both activate the physical conception of each creature and, given a sophisticated enough life form, place an established immaterial mind in that body. Akenside devotes the rest of proposition XXII to the odd claim that even though embodied souls in this life have no awareness of their preexistent histories—even though a rift divides our current mental awareness from our prior spiritual life—nonetheless "our Consciousness shall not be interrupted by Death" ("IW," 261). Speculations about the human soul again

[20] Dix, *Literary Career*, 104.

recall and refract theological debates about the Son of God. The idea of preexistence carries with it the problem of amnesia, which Milton tackled in *Paradise Regain'd* by experimenting with a Socinian (as opposed to a straightforwardly preexistent) Christ. Here Akenside tries to subsume the problem within his theory of ascendant minds. He tries, rather in the way Young tries, to merge the circular pattern of preexistence (the soul descends to earth and later returns to heaven) with a linear pattern of perpetual advancement (the mind climbs to ever new states of being). The logic of the proposition is difficult to parse, though. Perhaps Akenside's decidedly conjectural point is that memory of earthly life will be a product of the new powers the soul gains as it leaves the body, the post-embodied soul rising higher on the scale than either the embodied soul or (before that) the preexistent soul. In any case, his gnomic statements accepting the doctrine of preexistence reveal that his scheme puts pressure on the coherence of classificatory groups. The notion of individualized ascent up the scale appears preferable to regularized, system-wide progress because it stays more responsive to the volition of each mind and to the multiplicity of lived experience. But this attempt to personalize ascent also nudges the author toward a question that his essay can't adequately answer: how can various human beings be so different from one another as to occupy different points on the scale of being and yet remain members of the same identifiable species? It's a logical and conceptual problem for Akenside, but one whose post-Darwinian permutations have shaped modern biology.[21]

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[21] Although now phrased in the inductive language of biodiversity, what taxonomists and philosophers of biology call the "species problem" continues to be contested: "There are multiple ways to conceive of species that carve up biodiversity in different, inconsistent ways, without any promising solution." Richard A. Richards, "Species and Taxonomy," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Biology*, ed. Michael Ruse (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008), 161-88, at 172-73. One response is to argue that the problem derives from outdated Linnaean categories: see Marc Ereshefsky, *The Poverty of the Linnaean Hierarchy: A*

For Akenside too, albeit in a more abstract sense, the question turns upon the issue of differentiation. He presumes that a broad diversity of goods is itself a good, and he propounds a system of creation that strives to maximize potential for goodness. Such is his optimism that, as he writes in proposition VII, the divine mind chose for our universe "that Plan of Creation which is capable of containing the greatest *possible* Happiness" ("IW," 258, emphasis added). Proposition XIII explains that our created order, "composed of various Ranks of Beings," "is capable of containing a greater Quantity of Goods than a System of beings all of one Species and the same Faculties" ("IW," 259). The assertions of an aspiring physician, these passages adopt a method that is unabashedly quantitative. Increasing differentiation within the overall system of creation opens up new kinds of happiness; and the greater the number of kinds, the greater the total quotient of happiness. The God he describes continues to intervene in the created order for the sake of multiplying these gains.[22] No doubt this theory comes with its flourishes of human triumphalism: the author asks, for instance, "if the human Species were as numerous as its Habitation was fitted to contain (which might have been the Case at present, but for that Pestilence of the Creation, Tyranny) was it not wise and good to increase the Quantity of Happiness here, by adding the Orders inferior to Man?" ("IW," 259). Here it appears to be human happiness in particular

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Philosophical Study of Biological Taxonomy (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001). John S. Wilkins attributes the problem to a more basic disparity between the "neo-Platonic" understanding of species as "a top-down category of the logic of classification" and modern taxonomy's use of "bottom-up classification" with "inductive inferences and predicates." *Species: A History of the Idea* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2009), 233. Certainly Akenside is more invested in logical theorizing than in the sort of examination of specimens conducted by his Swedish contemporary Carl Linnaeus. Nor could Akenside, given his view of God's continual activity, consent to Linnaeus's understanding of species as stable fruits of an initial creation: "There are as many species as the Infinite Being produced diverse forms in the beginning." Quoted in Wilkins, *Species*, 72.

[22] Dix too disputes the old claim that Akenside was at bottom a deist; see *Literary Career*, 97-99.

that swells as lower creatures arrive and are admired, consumed, or otherwise enjoyed. Akenside's question takes for granted, however, that the earth can contain only so many human beings and that those new-made inferior orders can become something more in time. And with its jab at tyranny, the passage illustrates how Akenside, a Patriot Whig, can gauge quantitative happiness by reference to the liberty that's needed to achieve qualitative happiness.[23] In keeping with his theory of ascent, his question implies another one: how many creatures are being granted the freedom to rise to the enjoyment that minds alone can experience?

The "Immaterial World" essay argues that perpetual variation within the earth taken as a system yields a more diversified and hence a happier future. Referring at one point to the findings of astronomy, Akenside remarks that with enhanced faculties we may come to perceive our increasingly differentiated planet as just "a Part of a more extensive Whole" ("IW," 260). The difficulty I've been coaxing out of his essay has to do with such part-whole interactions on a lower level: the problem of how the species acts as a microcosm of the system of the earth. Consider two different approaches to the problem. First, we might assume that the system of the earth is self-contained. Increasing differentiation within a given species—movement by some creatures along an identifiable slice of the continuum of being, movement that allows for new aptitudes and experiences—enhances that group's total measure of happiness. But just as the system is closed, so the species must remain constant, and individual members can only be transformed within a certain span of possibility. Some

[23] See also Adam Rounce, "Akenside's Clamors for Liberty," in *"Cultures of Whiggism": New Essays on English Literature and Culture in the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. David Womersley, with Paddy Bullard and Abigail Williams (Newark, DE: Univ. of Delaware Press, 2005), 216-33.

humans, for instance, may gain new powers and their kind may become more diverse (occupying, that is, a greater number of points along the scale of being), but no such extension can take them outside of the stable category *human*. This first approach therefore conserves species designations. John S. Wilkins has traced the doctrine of "species fixism, the idea that species are as they have always been," back to the mid-seventeenth century, and especially to the English naturalist and natural theologian John Ray (1627-1705). To support his point that fixism arose from this period's debates about generation, he points out that Ray was a preformationist, one who believed that the creator installed all living things, in miniature, inside the very first creatures.[24] Wilkins doesn't develop the point, but preformationism and species fixism go hand in hand. Both strive to maintain the continuity of all species in the interest of vindicating God's once-and-for-all special creation at the beginning of time. Both correspondingly restrict change in the natural order within bounds drawn when the world was first made. (Even the mutability of species that Carl Linnaeus reluctantly accepted, as Wilkins points out, resulted from the hybridization of already existing ones.) Akenside's frustrations with materialism thus extend to preformationism and the resulting concept of species fixism: for him all three schools of thought unduly constrain God's power and the power of individual minds to change their lot. When all potential for transformation is localized within matter, it has too little room to maneuver.

As revealed most clearly in his reinterpretation of continual creation, Akenside doesn't envision the world as a closed system. So the first option will not suffice. Here, then, is a second possibility: species are mutable categories, rules made to be outgrown. A species

[24] Wilkins, *Species*, 93-95, 65-69; see also Wilkins's principal source on the generation debates: Elizabeth B. Gasking, *Investigations into Generation 1651-1828: History of Scientific Ideas* (London: Hutchinson, 1967).

is less a sacred and sealed container than a temporary holding chamber that can break open if deviation from type—a process propelled by individual volition but also facilitated by God—becomes more the new norm than the exception. It's no cause for concern that a given species may thereby turn into an evacuated category; other creatures will rise or else be created to take the open spot. Akenside never sounds quite this decisive in his essay. He allows, as I've shown, conceptual room for alternative understandings of ascent in which species do remain intact and at least contiguous. Yet he inclines toward characterizing movement on the scale of being in terms of individualism (hence the discussion of the preexistence of souls), and he remains reluctant to accept the limitations imposed by any account of the immutability or fixity of species. His theory therefore seems to accept that both the species (microcosm) and the world (macrocosm) operate as dynamic open systems. If species as well as world are structured to allow for openness, then minds don't have to keep to the substrate of bare matter, let alone the narrower category of the human as presently understood. All of this sounds promising, but the flaw of the second approach, theoretically speaking, is that it can't maintain coherence in the face of overwhelming complexity. Too much openness makes it hard to distinguish the parts from the wholes, a distinction that Akenside's theory takes for granted.

Scholars who study second-order systems theory take up a much later version of the difficulty that I'm suggesting Akenside's essay runs up against. To ratify the principle of openness from closure in the field of neocybernetics, Bruce Clarke and Mark Hansen distinguish between operational and informational change as they describe modern autopoietic (self-referential) systems: "The environment can perturb living, psychic, and

social systems but cannot *operationally in-form* them. More simply put, environmental stimuli can trigger systems to restructure themselves but cannot directly or causally impact their function." From the external environment such a system can take in energy but not direct informational or organizational input. To be open in one way, in fact, the system must be closed in the other: "operational closure—far from being simply opposed to openness—is in fact the precondition for openness, which is to say for any cognitive capacity whatsoever." Any such system must reduce "environmental complexity," the authors add, by "process[ing] it not as direct input but as perturbation catalyzing (internal) structural change."[25] It is through such processing that self-referential systems can sustain themselves and their activities amid potentially overwhelming external complexity. There are, needless to say, profound differences of disposition and outlook that separate this twenty-first-century discussion of systems from Akenside's vision of the created order. Even so, both accounts attempt to wrest openness from closure. Neocybernetic theorists must acknowledge the "self-producing and self-maintaining" operational boundaries that define self-referential systems and allow them to function at all,[26] but they need then to explain how these systems modify themselves in interacting with their environments and with other systems. Akenside begins with a conception of the world (*qua* matter) as closed, but then he postulates that God introduces changes to this world, proposing in effect that the material system of the earth overlaps with and responds to an ambient immaterial system. The suggestion carries with it an inchoate idea of secularism. The divine creator continues to introduce

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[25] Bruce Clarke and Mark B. N. Hansen, "Introduction: Neocybernetic Emergence," in *Emergence and Embodiment: New Essays on Second-Order Systems Theory*, ed. Clarke and Hansen (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2009), 1-25, at 9-10.
[26] Clarke and Hansen, "Introduction: Neocybernetic Emergence," 9.

modifications to the material earth from outside that system, but such differences, when seen from the inside, tend to be processed as internal "structural change" wrought by creatures or by matter itself.

Akenside, however, also insists on the possibility of a view from the outside, without which souls may become passive and forego their own power to reshape the earth. Perception is likewise at issue for the neocybernetic theorists, whose "key tenets" include these three principles: "observation is possible only on the part of an observing system"; "systems are self-referential, and so, in their treatment of matters beyond themselves, paradoxical"; and "that which is observed as paradoxical in our experience is not necessarily a cognitive aberration but is just as likely to be a necessary component of the possibility of any experience at all." On this telling, when a would-be perceiver attempts to see and understand the workings of a system beyond her own, her efforts will be frustrated or will fall into paradox or both. Yet if she weren't grounded in her current system, no act of observation would be possible at all: "our understanding of the world comes by way of an assessment of the world's impact on systems, which is to say on the very systems that give us cognitive purchase in the first place."[27] Let me submit that Akenside is more than dimly aware of this problem. To put it in his terms: the processes of human perception and cognition are for now indexed to human beings' current place within the overlapping systems of creation. That place, as *The Pleasures of Imagination* sometimes stresses, is where the immaterial mind finds itself tied to the percipient objects of material life. While accepting this insight, Akenside nevertheless puts forward another mode of perception whereby at

[27] Clarke and Hansen, "Introduction: Neocybernetic Emergence," 14.

least some (inspired) minds can attain a viewpoint that's not only outside the bounds of their species as currently defined, but also outside the material system as currently comprehended. This vantage must come from some new spot in the system of the immaterial world. Though such inspired minds must rely on paradox as a result, Akenside doesn't think they have to lapse into unintelligibility. He strives for a synthesis in which they can be both inside and outside, seeing from both earthly and divine perspectives.

LINGERING ENCHANTMENT

Akenside wants species and systems both to be flexible; but unlike the latter-day systems theorists, the Whig poet is committed to the agency of the free subject. At times he dreams that the energetic mind can reach beyond the confines of materiality and yet, in that very act of escape, catalyze change to the material system. Ascent becomes an experience of the difference it helps to usher in: a future state with multiplied forms of life and happiness. Akenside's early poetry considers the experience of ascent as it grapples with the problem of perception, the problem with which my previous section concluded. Trying to salvage an open understanding of the mind from the fixities of materialism and preformationism, *The Pleasures of Imagination* elaborates on the idea that Akenside first proposed in the "Hymn to Science": the poet is the type of the exceptional soul, at the cutting edge of what it means to be human. But this exceptionality, in tandem with the flexibility of systems, only reinforces the problem of perception: how is the poet able to see things differently? Akenside has two different answers, both of which presuppose that perception depends on the observer's relation to a dynamic scale of being. Each answer carries a different potentiality for poetry.

I'll treat the two one by one after I look briefly to a sequence early in *The Pleasures of Imagination*, a blank-verse poem in three books,[28] which juxtaposes them. In the first relevant passage, a Neoplatonic sketch of creation, Akenside writes that God, "in his unfathom'd essence, view'd at large | The uncreated images of things."[29] The deity trains his affection on these immaterial forms

> till in time compleat,
> What he admir'd and lov'd, his vital smile
> Unfolded into being. (*PI*, I.71-73)

The resolute diversity of material life—alternations between light and shade, the movement of the seasons, and "all the fair variety of things" (*PI*, I.78)—issues from this process of unfolding. I've noted that Akenside tries to undercut preformationism, the idea that generation is basically the nurturing of already formed material beings. Here Plato is enlisted for the cause. In this passage the forms, in what the poet takes to be Plato's sense (eternal and perfect), preexist the generation and later differentiation of creatures themselves. Akenside proposes that God can bring immaterial forms and a new material realm into productive exchange.[30] In time, God works with the consistent objective of bringing forth

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[28] Akenside's unfinished overhaul of the poem, which extended it to five books, was edited by Jeremiah Dyson and posthumously published as *The Pleasures of the Imagination* (1772). See Dix, *Literary Career*, 236-56. Though the occasional critic in the nineteenth century (Hazlitt for instance) or the twentieth (e.g., Jeffrey Hart, "Akenside's Revision of *The Pleasures of Imagination*," *PMLA* 74 [1959]: 67-74) deemed the changes salutary, Robin Dix concludes that "comparatively few readers have felt that the gains outweigh the losses." Dix, introduction to *Poetical Works of Mark Akenside*, 24.

[29] Akenside, *The Pleasures of Imagination*, I.65-66; hereafter abbreviated *PI* and cited parenthetically by book and line numbers. As mentioned above (see note 1), I quote from the 1744 first edition rather than the 1754 edition used by Dix in *Poetical Works of Mark Akenside*. In the case of this passage, the phrase "uncreated images of things" was amended in later editions to read "forms eternal of created things."

[30] Obviously a thinker comfortable with eclecticism, Akenside nowhere directly attempts to synthesize this Neoplatonic cluster of ideas with the doctrine of preexistence of souls, but the two could certainly be

increasing, and increasingly "fair," variety. The forms exist outside of earthly time, or rather on God's own time, and the creator may look upon and admire the full diachronic sweep of all things in a moment of synchronic clarity ("at large"). The trick of divine vision, it seems, is to understand how the forms and their instantiations relate. Perhaps, then, the special insight of the poet-figure is to discern the mysterious exchange that God has established between the material and immaterial worlds. And perhaps the poet must remain within that exchange, the strange interplay of body and soul, to register its inner workings.

Yet if some kind of connection to material life is always necessary, there remains the question of how Akenside's account of creation is warrantable. His next verse-paragraph introduces the notion that some human beings may come to perceive the created order from a superhuman viewpoint: "But not alike to every mortal eye | Is this great scene unveil'd" (*PI*, I.79-80). The natural environment "on peculiar minds | Imprints a diff'rent byass," Akenside writes, and to some among them

> the sire omnipotent unfolds
> The world's harmonious volume, there to read
> The transcript of himself. (*PI*, I.99-101)

The book of nature proves to be more than a record of God's deeds. High-ranging souls may "trace the bright impressions of his hand" while furthermore "see[ing] portray'd | That uncreated beauty" that delights his "mind supreme" (*PI*, I.102, 105-7). Akenside has proceeded from a general depiction of what God sees as he looks upon creation-in-process ("unfolded into being") to a different kind of "unfold[ing]": a revelatory disclosure, to

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made compatible. See Alfred Owen Aldridge, "The Eclecticism of Mark Akenside's *The Pleasures of Imagination*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 5 (1944): 292-314.

certain "peculiar minds," of God's own view of things. The latter process, it would seem, renders him fit to share the former image.[31] Inspired minds that attain divine perception—I'll refer to them indiscriminately as poetic minds or poetic souls—can see the system of material creation from the outside, but this is also to say they can see it from the vantage of a different system onto which that one opens. According to this second suggestion, the poet-figure gains exceptional powers of insight by breaking loose from the strings that tie mind to matter.

(a) Dreams of Matter

I'll focus first on the earlier response to the problem: that it is only possible because of constraints established by the ties that connect the observer's mind to material objects, constraints that also bind the poet to his present-day audience. To this way of thinking, the work of verse presupposes the poet's enmeshment in the material world. In Book I Akenside uses an analogy to Memnon's harp to elaborate on the imagination's sensitivity to nature:

> ev'n so did nature's hand
> To certain species of external things,
> Attune the finer organs of the mind[.] (*PI*, I.113-5)

The poetic soul, though initially separate from the natural order, gains perfect awareness not only of these objects of insight, but also of their effects on the mind. It

[31] Nicholas Reid similarly observes that for Akenside, as for some of his romantic readers, "people are not all created equal when it comes to reading the divine transcript." "Coleridge, Akenside and the Platonic Tradition: Reading in *The Pleasures of Imagination*," *AUMLA* 80 (1993): 31-56, at 35. See also John Norton, "Akenside's *The Pleasures of Imagination*: An Exercise in Poetics," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 3 (1970): 366-83, esp. 374-77.

At length discloses every tuneful spring,

To that harmonious movement from without,

Responsive. Then the inexpressive strain

Diffuses its inchantment[.] (*PI*, I.121-5)

"Inchantment" is the secret harmony between mind and matter, the rule without which vision would prove impossible. Though poetic souls may have greater perceptual powers than others—though they may stretch the range of human possibility and awareness—they still need an enchanted connection to the percipient objects around them. The song they sing, like the listeners who can hear it (if in fact poetry will make a difference), must stay within range of matter's charms.

Much later in the poem, in Book III, Akenside wonders whether creation would be sufficient if shorn of these elaborate ties:

But were not nature still indow'd at large

With all which life requires, tho' unadorn'd

With such inchantment? (*PI*, III.479-81)

Given the poet's assumptions, the world to which we feel ourselves bound is not essential to who we are: our "deep-felt joys and harmony of sound," as Akenside puts it, actually "result from airy motion; and [our joys] from shape | The lovely phantoms of sublime and fair" (*PI*, III.459-61). This phrasing of the complaint about "inchantment" indicates that the poet will respond with the same concern emphasized in his "Immaterial World" essay: the overall joy and happiness of the world's creatures. God sets the spell for the sake of maximizing the intensity and diversity of creaturely satisfactions. But if happiness is the consequence of the

spell by which souls are linked (however contingently) to matter, and if happiness continues to increase higher up the scale, then perhaps the mind won't actually escape such spells as it moves beyond the earthly body. As the mind strains beyond its place in the material system, it will find that new protocols for perceiving material objects must be established. If so, a sense of necessary if artificial connection between mind and matter isn't a fleeting quality of sublunary life. The sort of "inchantment" that ties perceiver to perceived may be impossible for the poetic soul to live without. For Elizabeth Rowe and Edward Young, the life of the immortal soul apart from the body may be a dream, but it's a dream worth preferring to any truth. For Akenside, it's clear that the soul is true and matter's solidity a chimera, but the dreams of matter are God's way of placing us in our world. They set the terms for all possible vision, even the exceptional vision that makes a poet a poet.

Akenside asks whether nature as such, stripped of the enchantment that mind brings to it, would suffice for the life and movement of creatures. His working answer is that the spell of perception supplies happiness and that the soul can't, even in the hereafter, make do without it. The poet's full response engages with the answer offered a few decades previously by Joseph Addison, from whose famous *Spectator* essays on the "Pleasures of the Imagination" (numbers 411 through 421) Akenside takes his title and some of his bearings.[32] Addison uses an allegorical vignette to address the specific concern about how perception

[32] Robert Marsh resists the characterization of Akenside as "primarily Addisonian" and argues that "a difference of basic method and of ultimate 'philosophic' principles" divides the two writers. "Akenside and Addison: The Problem of Ideational Debt," *Modern Philology* 59 (1961): 36-48, at 36 and 44. Steve Clark has also compared two of the intertexts I'm assessing: see "'To Bless the Lab'ring Mind': Akenside's *The Pleasures of Imagination*," in *Mark Akenside: A Reassessment*, ed. Robin Dix (Madison, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 2000), 132-55, at 139-42. Clark applauds pleasure in Akenside as related to "vigorous pursuit," whereas he describes pleasure in Addison as passive and finally "illusory" (142, 140-41).

arises from a governing spell. Meaning to popularize a famously counterintuitive philosophical claim, the essayist reflects on John Locke's "great Modern Discovery" that "Light and Colours, as apprehended by the Imagination, are only Ideas in the Mind, and not Qualities that have any Existence in Matter." What this means, Addison says, is that "we are every where entertained with pleasing Shows and Apparitions." Then his explanation turns to a different genre:

> In short, our souls are at present delightfully lost and bewildered in a pleasing Delusion, and we walk about like the Enchanted Hero of a Romance, who sees beautiful Castles, Woods and Meadows; and at the same time hears the warbling of Birds, and the purling of Streams; but upon the finishing of some secret Spell, the fantastic Scene breaks up, and the disconsolate Knight finds himself on a barren Heath, or in a solitary Desart. It is not improbable that something like this may be the State of the Soul after its first Separation, in respect of the Images it will receive from Matter.[33]

The perceiving mind creates the world as much as reflects it. In a precursor to the "brain in a vat" thought-experiment, Addison reflects on what such a mind would perceive if removed from the conditions of the spell. The best he can offer is a "barren Heath" or "solitary Desart": still some kind of material background to the soul's operation, but a scene lacking in charm. Theologically speaking, this position lines up well with the vexed tradition of Christian orthodoxy. As I discussed in the introductory chapter, taking Thomas Aquinas as an illustrative case, such dualist theology traditionally accepts that human souls can live apart

[33] [Joseph Addison], *The Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), III.546-47.

from bodies, just as the angels do; but it also insists that such life is unnatural—bare—for human beings, who are meant to occupy material bodies. Though their souls can exist in a separate state, it's not (say the orthodox) their proper state.

Addison's subsequent treatment of disembodied life is guarded, recalling Isaac Watts's insistence that we embodied humans can't yet know what such a state will be like. The *Spectator*'s short narrative scripts the death of the body as the end of the earthbound romance.[34] Surely new tales will follow, but we don't yet know how to read them, let alone situate ourselves as heroes within them. Akenside joins a countervailing trend in Whig writing, one that's more confident in depicting the soul's life after its detachment from the earthly body. True, the poet of *The Pleasures of Imagination* does at times appear to accept the insight, traced by Addison to Locke, that perception and cognition are for now only thinkable inside the frame of earthly corporeality. Akenside also lacks Young's unshakeable confidence that the body's desires pulse with the more profound cravings of the soul. But rather than go as far as Locke does, leaving the angels to themselves and an unaccountable future, Akenside concludes his retort to Addison by imagining the perceptual powers available to the soul at a higher point on the scale of being. "Mysterious ties" (*PI*, III.348) continue to condition—both delimit and enable—what the future-tending soul can take in.

Answering his question about "inchantment," Akenside determines that the ascendant soul no longer worries about "the pleasing error of his thought":

> Nor doubts the painted green or azure arch,

[34] Peter Walmsley reads the passage from *The Spectator* as revealing that Addison is finally "unwilling to accept" that the detached soul must sally forth without a bodily basis for perception. "Whigs in Heaven: Elizabeth Rowe's *Friendship in Death*," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 44 (2011): 315-30, at 321. This reading aligns Addison more closely to the claim that I'm tracking in Akenside's poem: that some connection to materiality must continue to obtain even after the soul's release from the dead earthly body.

Nor questions more the music's mingling sounds

Than space, or motion, or eternal time[.] (*PI*, III.492, 500-503)

According to this passage, the soul that reaches a future state of development needn't allow any desire for unvarnished truth to cloud the lovely prospects it continues to see. Far from being broken, the spell of sense, tying immaterial minds to percipient objects, is cast more perfectly in a higher realm. The charms of sense join up with the factors used by God, among them space and gravity and time, to manage his system of all systems. To complete this account, Akenside thus offers a strong reworking of Addison's allegory:

Th' advent'rous heroe, bound on hard exploits,

Beholds with glad surprize, by secret spells

Of some kind sage, the patron of his toils,

A visionary paradise disclos'd

Amid the dubious wild: with streams, and shades,

And airy songs, th' enchanted landscape smiles,

Chears his long labours and renews his frame. (*PI*, III.508-14)

The poet can already push into this new state of possibility. The newness comes thanks to the kindly patron, whose spell draws the adventurous soul even more powerfully once it has separated from its body. The songs are now more purely "airy," the landscape not disenchanted but more perfectly "enchanted." No suspicion subtends this soul-hero's "chear," for in Akenside's respun allegory the conclusive "surprise" is "paradise disclos'd" rather than withdrawn, the benignant spell cast anew rather than superseded. The rules, though surely different, have not been abolished. The soul can, from a changed vantage,

admire them for the effects it knows they facilitate. If the material world is the mechanism by which human beings begin to learn these lessons, then even the triumphantly detached soul can't escape the pull of matter, nor should it want to. It needs some utterly different substance to which, nonetheless, its perceptions are magically keyed and on which they rely. As though affirming this point, after Akenside ends his revision of Addison, he descends (as I'll discuss later on) to the topic of earthly taste. He returns to the soul's situatedness within material life.

(b) Spectacles of Education

In the prefatory "Design" Akenside explains that his poem addresses faculties of mind and circumstances of life that technically fall beyond the compass of the imagination but that feed into its powers. Consequently, in Book II the poet

> hasten[s] to recount the various springs
> Of adventitious pleasure, which adjoin
> Their grateful influence to the prime effect
> Of objects grand or beauteous, and inlarge
> The complicated joy. (*PI*, II.69-73)

He explores, in particular, how "th' impetuous nerve of passion" (*PI*, II.153) supplements imaginative delight. It's in considering this relationship that Akenside introduces the allegory of Harmodius. The "Design" says that this passage is intended to "inliven the didactic turn of the poem" and to "enumerate and exemplify these different species of pleasure; especially that from the passions," which he deems "supreme in the noblest works of human genius" ("Design," 6). The poet justifies in advance Book II's descent from the mind as such back to

the world of matter. Yet his ambition is more pointed than to represent, as one critic claims of the Harmodius passage, "the paradox of materially representing immaterial entities."[35] As other readers have proposed, the poet casts his allegory as a retelling of the Fall,[36] a retelling that furthermore comes nested in a performance of education.

His tale of a sage's instruction starts from the premise that "from passion's pow'r alone our nature holds | Essential pleasure" (*PI*, II.157-58). Teasing out the logic of this claim, the poet asks, "does every passion" truly "minister delight?" (*PI*, II.166-67). Shortly thereafter, following a stark caesura, his words are redirected:

> — Then listen, while my tongue
> Th' unalter'd will of heav'n with faithful awe
> Reveals; what old Harmodius wont to teach
> My early age[.] (*PI*, II.175-78)

Possessed by a new-sounding voice, a voice from the past or a shock of memory, the speaker declares that he will reveal what he once heard from a sage named Harmodius on the topic of passion's pleasures or pains. The speaker isn't just recounting speech; first he establishes the frame of mind of his younger self, the audience for the performance to come: "While mute attention hung upon his lips, | [. . .] thus the sage his awful tale began" (*PI*, II.185-86). After the speaker shifts from enacting his youthful words to those of Harmodius, the sage keeps the backward impulse going. Soon he recalls the perspective of his own younger self, at the time "when spotless youth with solitude resigns | To sweet philosophy

[35] Norton, "Akenside's *The Pleasures of Imagination*," 377.

[36] On the passage as a version of the Fall of Man, see for example Reid, "Coleridge, Akenside and the Platonic Tradition," 42-46. But see also Dustin Griffin, *Regaining Paradise: Milton and the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986), who takes Akenside's poem to be rather an un-telling than a retelling of the Fall.

the studious day" (*PI*, II.188-89). "Of good and evil much," Harmodius announces, "and much of mortal man my thought revolv'd" (*PI*, II.191-92).

The sage has already presented himself as meditating in solitude, but with the verb "revolv'd" Akenside gestures more directly to Milton's *Paradise Regain'd*, in which the Son of God, "musing and much revolving in his brest," is likewise led "far from track of men."[37] Akenside's passage also figures forth a desert education. Perhaps not surprisingly, then, Harmodius suffers through a harrowing experience that resembles the nighttime storm managed by Satan in Book IV of Milton's brief epic, "fierce rain with lightning mixt, water with fire | In ruine reconcil'd," and winds rushing in "from the four hinges of the world" (*PR*, IV.412-13, 415). In Akenside's poem, the sage is grieving for a deceased lover. The mere thought of her brings the pall of death, and the natural world arrays its powers against the young Harmodius. "Dark | As midnight storms," the speaker intones, the scene

> Appear'd before me; desarts, burning sands
> Where the parch'd adder dies; the frozen south,
> And desolation blasting all the west
> With rapine and with murder: tyrant-pow'r
> Here sits inthron'd in blood; the baleful charms
> Of superstition there infect the skies,
> And turn the sun to horror. (*PI*, II.204-12)

[37] John Milton, *Paradise Regain'd*, in *The 1671 Poems*, ed. Laura Lunger Knoppers, volume 2 of *The Complete Works of John Milton*, ed. Thomas N. Corns and Gordon Campbell (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008-), I.185, 191; hereafter abbreviated *PR* and cited parenthetically by book and line numbers.

Outward gales stir up inward ones, and even though Harmodius (in a lightly Miltonic touch) can discount what he sees as the outcome of powerful superstitions, Akenside's poem has all along been trying to sort through the intricate connection between the mind and the objects it perceives. Mere dismissal of the nightmarish scene therefore won't suffice. As Harmodius approaches the culmination of his learning (as retold by his older self via the poet), the anguished youth cries: "Gracious heav'n! | What is the life of man?" (*PI*, II.212-13).

Book II of *The Pleasures of Imagination* reconceives *Paradise Regain'd* largely by means of what happens next. The Son in Milton's poem must "endure the time," and after his "dismal night" he rises to face his tempter's final test (*PR*, IV.174, 452). Akenside takes the tradition of the brief epic, which Milton associated the biblical model of the Book of Job,[38] in a different direction. All of a sudden—as quickly as the poet's voice changed earlier in the passage—Harmodius sees a cloud descend from the heavens and "a more than human form" standing forth from it. "In mystic signs ingrav'd" on the angel's "æthereal" belt, Harmodius adds, "I read his office high and sacred name, | Genius of human kind" (*PI*, II.226, 235-37). In lieu of a diabolical tempter, a heavenly angel comes to visit the grief-stricken human after the midnight tempests subside. The student (and sage in the making) is then rebuked in Job-like terms by this Michael-like genius:

> Vain are thy thoughts, O child of mortal birth,
> And impotent thy tongue. Is thy short span
> Capacious of this universal frame? (*PI*, II.242-44)

[38] See Barbara Lewalski, *Milton's Brief Epic: The Genre, Meaning, and Art of "Paradise Regained"* (London: Methuen, 1966), esp. 3-36, 102-29.

If the answer to this accusatory question is a traditional *no*, then it would seem that neither Harmodius nor the poet can say what the life of man is, neither of them having a sufficiently capacious perspective. Patience like that of Milton's Son would need to be enough. Harmodius is appropriately chastened, and yet the angelic Genius doesn't stop with censure. Taking a cue perhaps from the Book of Isaiah, Akenside then has his angel stoop to touch Hermodius's forehead. "Raise thy sight," the angel instructs the human, "and let thy sense convince thy erring tongue" (*PI*, II.269-70). The genius, Harmodius discovers, is preparing a show:

> lo! the former scene was chang'd;
> For verdant alleys and surrounding trees,
> A solitary prospect, wide and wild,
> Rush'd on my senses. (*PI*, II.271-74)

The setting then contracts from the vastness of the "shaggy forest," "sable cliff," "hanging ridge," "crumbling soil," "congregated floods" (*PI*, II.275-82), and reveals—within a luxuriant plain—a "sylvan theatre," a "fair pavilion" along a riverbank (*PI*, II.291-93). Akenside establishes motion in the sequence without indicating who or what is moving. One possibility is that, to prove the malleability of perception, the genius modifies the spatial arrangement of the landscape. Another possibility, however, is that he leads Harmodius (who is, remember, already inhabiting a moment his own past) still farther back in time. The outward appearance of the landscape changes as time runs in reverse, all the way to the beginning of creation. The stage set by the Genius recalls Eden, and Akenside's "sylvan theatre" and "fair pavilion" recreate Milton's "Silvan Scene" and "woodie Theatre" (*PL*,

IV.140-41). Soon enough Harmodius is overtly instructed that the "mystic show" that he will watch has for its "scene" "the primæval seat | Of man" (*PI*, II.302, 366-67). Eden is thus further theatricalized, Milton's content become Akenside's form. The Whig poet reimagines *Paradise Regain'd* so that he may restage *Paradise Lost*, and so that he may render this moment of restaging a part of his own poem's action.

Once the actors step forward, the allegory begins in earnest. Virtue appears as a matronly governess and Euphrosyné as "her fair attendant, PLEASURE" (*PI*, II.676). To these figures God has assigned the care of the Adam figure, a "smiling youth" (*PI*, II.400). Within the fiction of Harmodius's education, another story of teaching seems to emerge. As John Sitter explains, the spectacle that unfolds offers "a refinement of the familiar 'Choice of Hercules,' in which the young hero weighs the charms of females personifying Virtue and Pleasure."[39] Angered by her charge's waywardness and his refusal to heed her lessons, the governess complains to God, who responds by withdrawing the younger Euphrosyné (Pleasure) for a time and sending, in her place, "the son of Nemesis" (*PI*, II.484), an "avenging dæmon" painted after the model of Milton's Death (*PI*, II.498). God commissions Virtue to protect the young man from this fiend. God also declares that the passion of despair brought by the dark enemy will remind the youth of Virtue's "superior charms," greater than "all the storms | Of night infernal" (*PI*, II.500, 498-99). It becomes clear that the "smiling youth" in the performance represents none other than the young Harmodius who witnesses it. The one-man audience sees a presentation of himself on the stage.

[39] John E. Sitter, "Theodicy at Midcentury: Young, Akenside, and Hume," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 12 (1978): 90-106, at 97. The relevant discussion reappears in Sitter's *Literary Loneliness in Mid-Eighteenth-Century England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1982), 157-74.

As the action proceeds, Virtue rebuffs the tormentor and then admonishes her pupil that his mind was made to rise in active effort. He must not, she tells him, allow his desires to "hang [. . .] below that measure of thy fate" (*PI*, II.565):

> Th' immortal mind, superior to his [the tormentor's] fate,
> Amid the outrage of external things,
> Firm as the solid base of this great world,
> Rests on his own foundations. (*PI*, II.588-91)

Virtue's sermon is efficacious: Sitter calls this a conversion episode.[40] The young man reacts with genuine amazement: "thou hast chang'd | My nature" (*PI*, II.613-14). Then he regains the companionship of Pleasure, too, before the performance ends and Harmodius the viewer watches "the whole romantic scene | Immediate vanis[h]" (*PI*, II.660-61). The heavenly Genius at last provides for Harmodius what was first promised in Akenside's "Design," a didactic gloss on the allegorical drama:

> VIRTUE's awful steps, howe'er pursued
> By vexing fortune and intrusive PAIN,
> Should never be divided from her chast,
> Her fair attendant, PLEASURE[.] (*PI*, II.673-76)

But why (Akenside's reader must ask) is this "mystic show" any more trustworthy than Harmodius's earlier superstition-induced vision of infernal storms? Both apparitions are powerful, and both touch the passions. The answer to which Book II gestures is that neither the heavens nor God's angels should be expected to dispel the enchantment that

[40] Sitter, "Theodicy at Midcentury," 98-99.

mysteriously connects the beholder to the beheld. When Akenside dramatizes the lessons that an angelic guide can teach, he presents not the end of spells, but even better spells. As in the retort to Addison, in the Harmodius passage the enchanting visions facilitated by heaven have to stand beyond doubt. These charms are features, not accidental bugs, of the system God has set.

The thread of Book II that ends with the youth's nature altogether "chang'd" extends back to the Genius's call for Harmodius himself to change (to "raise [his] sight") by watching the staged performance. What I've omitted from that thread is the Genius's prologue to the drama, which includes the crucial lines that first appeared in draft form in Akenside's "Principles of a Theory of the Immaterial World." Here the Genius compactly summarizes Akenside's economy of providence, according to which God chose the model of creation that permitted the widest possible range of happiness. And the active work of divine making, God's incessant poetics, continues apace. The Genius says that God was not content

> By *one* exertion of creating pow'r,
> His goodness to reveal; thro' every age,
> Thro' every moment up the tract of time,
> His parent-hand with ever-new increase
> Of happiness and virtue has adorn'd
> The vast harmonious frame: his parent-hand,
> From the mute shell-fish gasping on the shore,
> To men, to angels, to celestial minds,

For ever leads the generations on

To higher scenes of being[.] (*PI*, II.337-47)

Ascent up the scale of being in this passage also reflects upward motion through the elements: from water to land (the shellfish moving from one to the next), from land to air (inhabited by the lower angels), and then from air to outer space (and the "celestial minds" that inhabit its farthest reaches).

The Genius assures Harmodius—who in time assures the poet, who remembers and at last assures his own audience—that all life forms, down to the shellfish, may in time see from the Genius's angelic angle of vision. In a long authorial footnote, though, Akenside reveals how his optimistic portrait of ascent can at times subordinate individual mobility to the dictates of systemic progression. The footnote translates a passage from Plato's *Of Laws*, claiming that God "has dispos'd and complicated all things for the happiness and virtue of the whole." Akenside goes on: "one of these parts is yours, O unhappy man! which tho' in itself most inconsiderable and minute, yet being connected with the universe, ever seeks to co-operate with that supreme order. You in the mean time are ignorant of the very end for which all particular natures are brought into existence, that the all-comprehending nature of the whole may be perfect and happy" (*PI*, note at II.304). Akenside presents the ascent from shellfish to angel as requiring human beings to embrace their current position in the progress of development. The ties that bind perceiver to perceived within the material world—the "unhappy man" being "connected with the universe" in this way among others—represent a God-sanctioned condition without which the system couldn't persist, let alone foment widespread happiness. Sounding like the Genius who rebukes Harmodius, Akenside insists

that human beings go astray when they try to think outside enabling limits. Not even exceptional souls, to this way of thinking, can stretch beyond the beneficent influence of enchantment—and it's a good thing, too.

As Akenside's footnote validates this argument, however, his poem keeps alive an alternative to it. The Genius, remember, does more than rebuke. In the dramatic context of the poem, he communicates—angel speaking to human—his vision of a diversifying and upward-tending creation. He avows that created life forms may come to "higher scenes of being," and Akenside's nod to theatricality is salient. The footnote describes humans as minute cogs in a vast machine whose workings they cannot fathom. This understanding of ascent aligns proliferating happiness with a broadly shared future. What this understanding can't quite allow is for exceptional minds to attain the kind of perspective that would reveal the machine to be itself a cog. An emphasis on one's settled place in a changing system keeps the perceiver from reaching the sort of new vantage that Harmodius attains in the allegorical passage: watching his drama from the outside. Although in context that airy spectacle is only possible thanks to the Genius's spell, the passage also brings out the idea that the audience needs some distance from the stage (as Harmodius needs some distance from himself) to see the play properly. An outsider's vantage appears to be a different version of divine vision. Akenside accepts that the normal workings of perception keep the perceiver mysteriously tied to matter's objects, and he often depicts special perceptive power as fine-tuned sensitivity to the interplay between body and spirit. Even the poetic mind that forges ahead into futurity's promise must stay tethered by these bonds. Yet Akenside also

wants to hold onto the contrary claim that the poet-figure can attain the detached perspective of a purely immaterial world.

THE INSPIRED POET UNBOUND

In this section I'll consider that second answer to the problem of perception, suggested by moments in *The Pleasures of Imagination* where the exceptional mind seems to escape the binding charms of material life. Akenside lays the groundwork for this alternative notion of poetic insight in the poem's "Design." There he accepts that the intricate connection between mind and matter has profound effects on the perceptual capacities of higher animals. He likewise concedes that the imaginative arts begin by imitating the material life that sensation reveals. Referring to poetry as a classic case, though, Akenside argues that the refined arts do not remain rooted for long in body-derived images: "But these arts, as they grew more correct and deliberate, were naturally led to extend their imitation beyond the peculiar objects of the imaginative powers; especially poetry, which making use of language as the instrument by which it imitates, is consequently become an unlimited representative of every species and mode of being" ("Design," 5). According to this synopsis of the literary arts, the imagination first develops protocols or forms for imitating sensory experience, but eventually these forms become a new kind of content. Rather than continuing to recreate the first-order experience of perception, language supplies material that can be shaped anew, in more abstract ways, by higher-order poetic language. Not without defensiveness, Akenside suggests that the resources of such evolving poetry are boundless. Even if we take his word "species" in the broadest available sense, the progress of poetry here adopts a pattern of growth—toward a future characterized by distance from

an initial material basis and by increasing differentiation—similar to the one that ascendant life forms take in the "Immaterial World" essay.

An individual mind develops forms of language to organize and imitate material life, but in time (so the argument runs) these forms turn into the content of more sophisticated linguistic activity. Whereas Akenside begins the "Design" by emphasizing the mediating function of imagination, his third paragraph subordinates the bodily senses, in terms of their explanatory power, to the immaterial mind taken on its own. Continuing this new deference to the mind's autonomy, the author says his poem will try to establish that the pleasures derived from either nature or art "*might be deducible from one or other of* [the] *principles of the constitution of the human mind*" ("Design," 5). The shift he makes in the preface is from characterizing the mind in terms of its necessary engagement with matter (the work's first hint about those mysteries ties) to asserting that imaginative activity can disclose the mind's own nature, understood as only provisionally rooted in a bodily framework.[41] The latter assertion carries with it Akenside's dream of a view from nowhere—the possibility of a futural perspective outside the parameters of a material world that normally conditions thought.

This spurning of bodily limits comes out clearly in a stunning passage toward the end of Book I, in which Akenside contemplates the proliferation of life and the ascendancy of mind. These lines foreshadow what the Genius will say with more exactness in Book II, and they likewise take for granted that the spatial figure of the scale of being is temporalized,

[41] It's true that Akenside's "Design" also accounts for the other mode of perception, the one that stresses the perceiver's connection to material life. In the "Design" the two modes run in parallel, just as I present them in this chapter. But the preface ends with the hope that the poem might unify "in the same point of view" the material and immaterial worlds ("Design," 7). I'll return to this hope for synthesis in my conclusion.

movement up the scale revealing creation's changes over time. But in this case Akenside accentuates the "advent'rous" soul's dexterity in getting out of the typical curve of development (*PI*, I.439). Having already presumed "to delineate nature's form," the writer says he will "trace the rising lustre of her charms, | From their first twilight" (*PI*, I.439, 444-45). He associates poetic illumination with the ability to condense such massive diachronic movement into a narrow span (here, around a hundred lines). Like God in the Neoplatonic sketch of creation, the poet can scan materiality's changes, its spaces and times, all at once.

Beauty in this passage follows life's diversifying process as it moves up the scale. It makes its first appearance amid lower beings, with "mingling" colors as well as "random blaze[s]" remaining indistinct (*PI*, I.448). Increasing "variation of determin'd shape" occurs higher up, and geometric figures begin to unite beauty with "truth's eternal measures" (*PI*, I.450-51). Higher still, vegetative life divulges nature's power "to draw with pregnant veins | Nutritious moisture from the bounteous earth" (*PI*, I.459-60). Then animal life—Akenside names birds, horses, and dogs—achieves a "vital change of growth, | Life's holy flame and piercing sense" (*PI*, I.467-68). The range of beauty therefore expands, the poet says, as life becomes characterized by further and newer "complicated members," until there "dawns the high expression of a mind" (*PI*, I.475). The self-consciousness that results inexorably changes the terms on which beauty operates. Now the self-aware mind can look upon itself and detect there "the living fountains" of all that is "beauteous and sublime" (*PI*, I.482-83).[42]

[42] Having reflected on these lines, critic Kirk M. Fabel determines that *The Pleasures of Imagination* is in the end "unwilling to admit that beauty is 'objective.'" "The Location of the Aesthetic in Akenside's *Pleasures of Imagination*," *Philological Quarterly* 76 (1997): 47-68, at 60. This argument lines up with what I claimed above about the seemingly normal operation of perception in the system of creation: perception depends on the relative position of the perceiver. But the second conceptualization I'm trying to identify in the poem—the claim that inspired minds can access vantage points that properly belong to an evolved

The mind's operations turn in upon themselves, forms again becoming new content, and the mind can affirm its freedom from the material substrate that was meant only for its gestation.

In such a context Akenside can comfortably refer to Lucretius's version of materialism. It's worth repeating that this school of thought, which sees "consciousness [as] a higher-order property that somehow emerges out of the activity of lower-order, senseless atoms,"[43] gained traction in Restoration England, and Akenside's depictions of ascent, though laboring to maintain a dualist outlook, occasionally invoke it. The poet thus shares his supernatural vision by summoning his reader to

> trace the forms
>
> Of atoms moving with incessant change
>
> Their elemental round; behold the seeds
>
> Of being, and the energy of life
>
> Kindling the mass with ever-active flame[.] (*PI*, I.515-19)

But for Akenside, it is the lively divine flame that encourages material life to greater sophistication until it finally proves worthy of soul and self-awareness. Rather than cropping up in a way that the material order can fully explain, the mind is the provision of a spiritual God, who allows creatures to improve themselves through constant labor and thus to participate in his continual creation. A reward for their long labors is preliminary access to the immaterial world, full immersion in which may be the destiny of earth's creatures. The

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future—seems to redefine objectivity in terms of a break from materiality. Beauty can be objective in this sense, provided that the beholder stands outside of matter.

[43] Kramnick, *Actions and Objects*, 67.

poet in his next breath describes an order of existence altogether beyond the ken of "brute, unconscious matter":

> Then to the secrets of the working mind
> Attentive turn; from dim oblivion call
> Her fleet, ideal band; and bid them, go!
> Break thro' time's barrier, and o'ertake the hour
> That saw the heav'ns created: then declare
> If aught were found in those external scenes
> To move thy wonder now. (*PI*, I.520-26)

Not only does mind (from a human vantage) arise from matter; it also (from a divine one) precedes it. Akenside starts with a Lucretian theory of emergence, but then he implies that such a materialist theory results from the interpreter's being lodged inside the frame he is trying to explain. There is a material world, but there is also an immaterial one, and the soul is the channel from one to the other. The poet declares that he (unlike the reader who rests content with matter) can reach more fully into the latter world, out of the realm in which change has to be reduced to atoms. Such a push doesn't merely represent one among many comparable rungs up the ladder of creation. It marks, rather, a rupture, beyond which materiality's ornaments cannot excite wonder. From this view they look "dull," "pall[ing] the languid eye" (*PI*, I.530-31). This dullness is astoundingly different from the charms that Akenside elsewhere celebrates. Only when apart from the spell of material perception, the passage suggests, can the exceptional mind see things as they truly are. Akenside unsettles Lucretian atomism not by opposing it head on, then, but by containing it inside a system that

he subsumes within a larger one. Along the way he associates poetic vision with the power to see materiality as "external" to the separable soul, at both the beginning and in the future.

Like Rowe and Young, Akenside makes but doesn't justify a transfer from what the mind can think to where it can go. Still, of the three Whig poets examined in this study, Akenside has surely the most complicated relationship to materialism. When he indicates that an immaterial mind needs always to be tied, for perception's sake, to the world of matter, he comes close to being a dualist only in theory. His attention to material life (not least in his embryological work) at times suggests a softening of the anti-materialist critique and a new willingness to consider whether mind emerges from changing matter. Yet this is the same writer who claims that mind is installed in material creatures by God, indeed that God is involved in the physical conception of every living thing. Akenside seems hopeful that these clashing positions can be syncretized. Perhaps he suspects that God both facilitates a long preparation for mentality at the macro level—shellfish in the course of time becoming fit for angelic intellection—and implants individual minds at the micro level—every creature a special creation. Some such resolution would reinforce the point that rings out more clearly in the passage from late in Book I: while all of creation is in the process of ascending, some especially gifted minds can stretch ahead in individualized futural movement. Akenside avers that beauty's forms contribute to the mind's self-reflexivity, and forms initially developed to make sense of material life prove detachable from that life and applicable instead to the mental operations that created them. This is the common dispensation. But the special mind that can describe it, and can "break thro' time's barrier," positions itself as having already seen from outside the material.

The mind that takes in "the hour | That saw the heav'ns created" (*PI*, I.523-24) obtains the point of view of the divine Logos, which the Gospel of John identifies with the Word (and in turn with Christ), who according to orthodox doctrine served as the instrument of creation. Akenside's "working mind" in this sense becomes a god-man, one who, despite being installed in a temporally circumscribed body, has a separate relation to the time of spirit. But unlike the orthodox Christ who empties himself of divine power (and appears not to remember his preexistent state), the exceptional soul can access its heavenly future already. It can outstrip "the herd of servile minds" that stay stuck in the present, in the body, and in existing political regimes (*PI*, I.560). This soul is God's immaterial proxy, as it were, in the material system he made and continues to remake. God works on nature, the exceptional soul on culture. It shuttles the future's changes back to the present. This rhythm calls to mind another biblical image: like the heavenly angels ascending and descending on Jacob's ladder, the divinized soul, Akenside's variation on the god-man, moves up or down a temporalized scale of being.

An earlier sequence in Book I further substantiates this possibility. Robin Dix's note in his modern edition claims that the relevant passage "draws extensively on the tradition of the 'cosmic voyage' common in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century literature."[44] Among the precedents he names, Dix does not mention Satan's voyage toward earth through space and Chaos. Even though the soul in Akenside's early passage flies in the other direction, nonetheless she (the poet uses feminine pronouns for much of the passage) is comparably "proud to be daring" and "impatient to be free," she "disdains to rest her heav'n-aspiring

[44] Dix, *Poetical Works of Mark Akenside*, 443.

wing | Beneath its native quarry," and she pensively spies the edges of the known world "till, half recoiling, down the headlong steep | She plunges" (*PI*, I.174, 171, 184-85, 209-10). Presumably allusions such as these lie behind John Sitter's quip that Akenside celebrates human exceptionalism in ways that Pope would find "foolish" and Milton "satanic."[45] Whereas Milton's Satan chafes under what he sees as God's tyranny, Akenside adapts the rhetoric of impatience and strenuous activity to describe how the soul, "tir'd of earth | And this diurnal scene" (*PI*, I.185-86), longs to escape the limitations of the present. The soul (now going by a different pronoun) wants a more encompassing vision, wants "to shake each partial purpose from his breast" (*PI*, I.160), and wants to move through a "boundless theatre" of new powers and viewpoints (*PI*, I.157).

Crucial for the Harmodius episode, the language of theatricality and spectatorship is illustrative in this earlier passage, too. The sequence builds toward a culminating description of the soul, having made its course "up the steep ascent | Of nature" (*PI*, I.164-65), at last taking in a view of the infinite. Perhaps aware of the danger of imposing earth's time on the boundless heavens, the poet goes on to fit the soaring mind with a kind of temporal gravity: an "unrelenting sway" that can "bend the reluctant planets to absolve | The fated rounds of time" (*PI*, I.193-95). Because the earth's temporality of repetition depends on regular planetary cycles, the soul that escapes that cycle must have the power to traverse a different pathway of time-experience. But it's more important that the soul can see the effects of its own action, as though witnessing its own performance. The soul "*beholds* his unrelenting sway" as its cuts this new course through space's time (*PI*, I.193, emphasis added). Akenside

[45] Sitter, "Theodicy at Midcentury," 96.

tries to coordinate the soul's own vision, watching planets yield before it, with a spectator's vision of this scene. Implicit, as well, is the stronger if paradoxical claim that the soul can watch itself move as from the outside—watch itself command the matter it no longer inhabits but over which it has all authority. The rising mind doesn't escape all manner of theatricality when it escapes the theatre of the earth.[46] But it does escape the charmed ties in whose light the earth's puny objects appear wondrous. Here the soul's own activity is what draws its admiring gaze. Poetic vision in this passage has also escaped the material basis from which it first set out; now poetry works in the spirit world of language, lord over the matter it can see clearly but to which it's not bound.

If the language of theatrical performance enables the inspired soul to be both actor and (in a sense) audience, the telling problem is that no scene goes on forever. When the sequence draws to a close, the inspired soul continues to rise, but Akenside's readers (and the poet too, I think) find their view of the continuing action impeded as the curtain falls:

> Thro' all th' ascent of things inlarge her [the soul's] view,
> Till every bound at length should disappear,
> And infinite perfection close the scene. (*PI*, I.219-21)

Perfections being infinite, the audience can't see them all at once. For the inspired soul, further motion into a boundless futurity always holds out promise for newer and higher joys, enlarged views. Yet according to the line that appears just before this pleasing picture of continuous ascent, the inspired soul "turn[s] disdainful to an equal good" (*PI*, I.218). The

[46] My earlier article on Akenside's poem approaches this point in a different framework and with a different emphasis. See Dustin D. Stewart, "Akenside's Refusal of Allegory: *The Pleasures of Imagination* (1744)," *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 34.3 (2011): 315-33.

curtain that falls thus cuts off the exceptional soul from the common lot. Commoners have much to learn from truly inspired poets, no doubt, but they are in the end different. Akenside's falling curtain betrays an anxiety—a nearly Calvinistic unease—that underlies his second view of poetic perception. The author has been associating poet-figures with especially perceptive souls, whose unusual power allows them to escape matter's staged spectacles and see from the outside. But what if the curtain keeps the writer among the crowd rather than separate from them?

In Book III Akenside returns to the idea that normal perception involves a spell, only to declare that getting outside of that spell means penetrating its mysteries. Trying now to synthesize "the various aspects of the mind" he has been considering, the poet calls out for

> Some heav'nly genius, whose unclouded thoughts
> Attain that secret harmony which blends
> Th' æthereal spirit with its mold of clay;
> O! teach me to reveal the grateful charm
> That searchless nature o'er the sense of man
> Diffuses, to behold, in lifeless things,
> The inexpressive semblance of himself,
> Of thought and passion. (*PI*, III.279-86)

The author yearns to divine—in Kirk Fabel's paraphrase, to "demonstrat[e]" or "textualiz[e]"—the charm of perception, the secret relationship between the mind and

material objects.[47] In the context of perception's normal functioning, he desires to see what can't be seen: the conditions that make vision possible. Needing therefore a perspective outside the reciprocity of "spirit" and "clay," the poet asks for the instruction of a "genius," a tutor akin to Harmodius's heavenly guide in the Book II allegory. But—to draw an admittedly fine distinction—whereas the Genius descended to meet Harmodius on earth, the poet here wants to be exalted to the heavens. He doesn't plea to become a disembodied spirit himself, though I think these lines assume that he will become one. Akenside asks for a perspective that may eventually be available to all life forms, provided a stretch of time for which the poet in him has no patience. The viewpoint for which the inspired poet is bold to pray is the vantage of a future when matter and spirit no longer intermix but are themselves differentiated.

One magic that is subsequently presented to Akenside is the energy of association, the "kindred pow'r of such discordant things," which uses discrete images—no matter if juxtaposed by chance and "howe'er distinct | Th' external scenes"—to give separate ideas "an eternal tie, | And sympathy unbroken" (*PI*, III.306, 315-18). It is the "mysterious ties" of association, the poet goes on to declare, that underpin "the busy pow'r | Of mem'ry" (*PI*, III.348-49). Memory in turn makes possible artistic creation. In one of the most influential stretches of the poem, Akenside depicts "the child of fancy" meditating on all "the various forms of being" gathered together by memory (*PI*, III.375, 353). This poet-figure by turns "compares," "blends," "divides," "inlarges," "extenuates"—in short, "infinitely varies"—these forms. At last, just as creation first sprung from Chaos, a "disentangled [. . .] design"

[47] Fabel, "Location of the Aesthetic," 58.

emerges (*PI*, III.391-405). Much of this procedure seems to evoke a mimetic theory of what an earlier line calls a "mimic art" (*PI*, III.354). Yet as Dix has shown in a detailed reading of the passage, other moments in the act of creation portrayed by Akenside conjure a different theory of art: "Even the physiological effects on the body of the creating artist—the dilating nerves, the heaving bosom, the loveliest frenzy, the rolling eye—are reminiscent of sexual ecstasy, while the fact that the rolling eye darts from heaven to earth and back suggests a quasi-divine aspect to artistic creativity." Dix concludes that Akenside can't unite the mimetic with the organicist language: "It seems that whilst Akenside's epigenetic embryology enabled him to infuse the vocabulary of organicism with new meaning, he did not pursue his discovery to the point where organicism dislodged the deeply rooted idea of art as essentially imitative, and of artistic form as determined by external considerations rather than principles integral to itself."[48] Akenside is a necessarily transitional figure in this literary-historical story, looking back to mimesis as well as ahead to organicism. What Dix doesn't acknowledge is that Akenside wants a perspective that can't be reconciled with either mimesis or organicism: an angelic view of the created world, one that might offer memories of the future that can (if all goes well) reshape the present. The heavenly child of fancy becomes the father of the earthbound man.

Near the end of the poem, Akenside redefines taste (he might as well have said *sensibility*) as a set of

internal pow'rs

Active, and strong, and feelingly alive

[48] Dix, *Literary Career*, 121-22.

To each fine impulse[.] (*PI*, III.515-17)

"GOD alone," the poet adds, can bestow "the secret byass of the soul" (*PI*, III.523), part of the work of continual creation. Now taste's powers are activated only in use, and they depend for their formation on the wider "culture's kind parental aid" (*PI*, III.538). If properly tended, though, tastes can be dispersed and diversified. Some minds seek after sublimity, Akenside says, while others look for harmony, and others for "gentlest beauty" (*PI*, III.550). The sphere of poetry operates according to this general pattern of development through differentiation. To read Shakespeare is to encounter an author who "enjoys | The elemental War," whereas listening to Waller one hears "the tale of slighted vows and love's disdain | Resound soft-warbling all the live-long day" (*PI*, III.556-57, 562-63). A teeming variety of tastes offers ever more abundant pathways to finding "fresh pleasure, unreprov'd" (*PI*, III.598). But Akenside's special theory of perception—the possibility that some unique souls can see from the vantage of the immaterial world—indicates that poetic change might be less the product of a gradually forward-tending process than the result of some exceptional minds who flash to the future and back.

Akenside ends his poem by envisioning the active mind in conversation with other divine intelligences:

wont so long
In outward things to meditate the charm
Of sacred order, soon she seeks at home
To find a kindred order[.] (*PI*, III.601-4)

Appealing to the "elements and seasons," nature's own forms of change, the poet—here more like Young than Thomson—urges that these courses point beyond themselves, to a grander place from which human beings can "behold and love" what God does, "the general orb | Of life and being" (*PI*, III.622, 626-28). Inspired minds now see the created system ever from without, as a single whole. In this culminating passage at least, the ties that once attached these perceivers to objects can be understood since they're no longer needed as tools. These beings "with GOD himself | Hold converse" and "form to his, the relish of their souls" (*PI*, III.630-31, 633). This God is a divinity who never ceases creating, and so his "relish," as well as the pleasure of the rare "souls" who share it, must be taken in the dynamism that defines Akenside's theory of creation, in which different means more and more is increasingly better. The detachable mind rejects a materialism identified with the present and carries forward the audacious promises of human perfectibility. But again the scene must end, and again the poet must hope that his own, more select "kindred order" will be on the right side of the curtain, apart from the charmed crowd.

CONCLUSION

Akenside renders ascent into futurity as ascent up the scale of being, and I've isolated in *The Pleasures of Imagination* two distinct ways to think about how this motion relates to the exceptional perception of the poet-figure. On the one hand, all of creation is climbing spiritward, either uniformly or (more likely) sporadically, and the poet exemplifies the future's power by displaying an acute sensitivity to the spell that links immaterial mind with matter. The interplay between the two worlds is the site of special insight. But such sensitivity assumes that the poet, whether on earth or in heaven, operates inside the spell's

workings. On the other hand, because creation is ascending at an uneven rate—provided that systems and species are flexible—some rare souls can somehow escape the spell, seeing through its mysteries from a divine perspective. To perceive material life from without is the special power of the poet. Both possibilities reject the thesis that all change is fixed in a prearranged past. Change is instead held in a futurity that brings increasing diversity and happiness, but Akenside can't settle the question of what insight entails in that future state. Nor can he resolve what happens when inspired poets hasten it to the present.

My hunch is that Akenside wanted to harmonize these two possibilities. He hoped to be so keenly aware of the fine strings that link body and soul that he could play music with them. But his belief in the poet's exceptionality also led him toward a contrary understanding, for which souls can break free from those strings (Rowe would have said chains) and can hazard a view from the immaterial world. In very speculative terms, we might say that the synthesis for which Akenside yearns would allow the poet's view-from-outside experience to inform others' view-from-inside experience. One can imagine, as a strangely Lamarckian corollary, that the inspired poet who reaches into the difference of an immaterial future also helps fellow humans to stretch more quickly toward that state. Perhaps the rare poetic soul might learn to toggle back and forth from its place in matter to its view from nowhere. Such a process of rising and returning would allow it to use the future's ever-expanding awareness to remold the present. It would come back each time bearing memories of the future.

Akenside didn't accomplish such a synthesis. But maybe this failure to harmonize is in its own way salutary.[49] To the question "How far away from everyday life must the poet be?" Akenside's greatest poem doesn't provide a single answer. It reveals two, and the two need to be experienced as different.[50] Akenside offers, in other words, a fresh differentiation of poetry's possibilities. In a detailed history of eighteenth-century intellectual disciplines, Robin Valenza asserts that only with Coleridge and Wordsworth (studious readers of Akenside, by the way) did poetry begin "to assume its distinctively modern role: it took on many of the functions of a disciplinary language while still claiming universal intelligibility." It was with the romantics, she claims, that literature began "to stand for the writing which tried to bridge the gap between the learned and the lay reader."[51] Valenza offers a valuable account of poetry's paradoxical station both inside and outside the differentiation of disciplines. What she misses is an earlier formulation of English poetry's troubled relationship to the process of diversification. By the middle of the eighteenth century, Akenside was wondering how being outside of the disciplines could give the poet a special purchase on them. More precisely, he was imagining how the mind of the poet could hold its

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[49] Here I have in mind Claire Colebrook's comments on how Deleuze responds to Kant: "When Deleuze writes on Kant and (with Guattari) on the relation among the faculties he asks by what right we have assumed that one ought to harmonize these powers. If thinking can take these diverse paths, and can operate at once to think beyond this concrete world *and* to experience the singular concreteness of this world *and* to think of this world as organized into discrete and repeatable function, then why would one reduce the artwork to an indication of the faculties' harmony?" Colebrook concludes that "for Deleuze and Guattari philosophy would not be, as it was for Kant, a resolution of conflicts among the faculties, but an intuition of distinctions." *Blake, Deleuzian Aesthetics, and the Digital* (London: Continuum, 2012), xxx-xxxi.

[50] Colebrook makes a related point about Blake: "The voice of the prophet is necessarily double, at once breaking free from systems and yet productive of a further system and judgment. Once voice gives itself forth in text it is not only quotable, repeatable, and liable to mutation and distortion; it also becomes detached from any authentic presence or guarantee." *Blake, Deleuzian Aesthetics, and the Digital*, xxxviii.

[51] Robin Valenza, *Literature, Language, and the Rise of the Intellectual Disciplines in Britain, 1680-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009), 145.

place inside worldly creation—fixed to matter by mysterious ties that make perception possible—and yet also stand outside or above the normal process of perception. One might well conclude that Akenside still needed the power of the detachable soul to theorize imaginative insight. Yet his writings also work to reverse this sequence: the poet now is one who can mobilize the otherwise stifled, neglected, or repudiated soul. Hence the urgency with which Akenside feels he needs to grant astonishing powers to inspired poets, the unacknowledged legislators of two intersecting worlds. Such forceful claims for poetry's authority probably stem from—and in other writers they certainly coexisted with—anxieties about poetry's diminishing cultural significance.[52]

There is one more final synthesis that Akenside doesn't quite pull off. As Ann Thomson has shown, the "most acute phase" of the English debate about the immateriality of the soul had ended by the middle of the century, and most of the radical arguments espoused in previous decades by English thinkers—aligned one way or another with Socinian thought—had reached across the Channel and reemerged as a different breed of materialism in France.[53] In Akenside's case, the triumphant idea of the immaterial soul links up with a dynamic, temporalized scale of being and a bold reworking of the doctrine of continual creation. The resulting claim is that creatures can rise to become minds, and minds in turn can rise to see creation from a divine perspective. Even a shellfish, given the right tract of time, can become an angel. Perhaps this vision of ascent carries forward the possibility of a new rapprochement between Milton's materialism and Whig anti-materialism,

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[52] Akenside, however, is no Gray, the poet whom Suvir Kaul most convincingly associates with "a fear of destabilisation and confusion following upon [. . .] unregulated, uncontrolled social differentiation." *Thomas Gray and Literary Authority: A Study in Ideology and Poetics* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1992), 9.
[53] Ann Thomson, *Bodies of Thought: Science, Religion, and the Soul in the Early Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008), 134.

mediated in part through the terms of a reemerging Neoplatonism. Significantly, Akenside's poem fancies all of this happening without reference to trinitarian mediation. Thus the dissenting poet subtly passes forward the anti-trinitarianism of *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regain'd*. At the same time, however, Akenside discounts Milton's apocalyptic vision of God become "all in all." Though Akenside shares the belief that other creatures, not just humans, will ascend to a divinized state, he also insists that God keeps on forging new life forms. In an expansionist age, there is no end to the dynamism of systems, no final moment when the soul exhales, returns to its origins, and rests. The need for the new and the different keeps driving inspired minds futureward. And a prophet has no honor in his own time. Even when Akenside's exceptional souls redefine human possibility and supply tomorrow's difference for today, they must also continue to feel their difference from the common present.

Coda: Ghosts of Futures Past

This project has spanned most of what some scholars have begun to call the Long Restoration in England. My last two chapters took up major poems from the mid-1740s, the moment when the final Stuart threat was put down at the Battle of Culloden. And I began with Milton's *Paradise Regain'd*, which appeared in print late in 1670, just a decade after the return of Charles II to the throne. That decade—as Laura Lunger Knoppers has summarized it—brought not only the devastations of a plague and the Great Fire of London, but also a series of events that raised doubts about the restored Stuart monarch's commitment to English Protestantism. Charles waged war with the Dutch, established a secret treaty with the French, promoted the passage of a new licensing act to curtail sedition, and supported new parliamentary measures to smoke out and punish dissenting religious practice—none of which could be kept separate in the public imagination from the personal proclivities of a king "widely viewed as luxurious and dissolute" and a court increasingly suspected of being "popish-leaning."[1] Filtered through the lenses of party polemic and religious apologetic, these associations continued to inform Whig poetry long after the Revolution of 1688-89. From the perspective of some later Whig writers, the materialism of Charles's debauched court fit hand in glove with other cultural threats: libertinism in style, licentiousness in behavior, and neoclassicism in art. Whether or not they had read for themselves the second Earl of Rochester's translations of Lucretius or Seneca, the poets I've been examining in the

[1] Laura Lunger Knoppers, "'Englands Case': Contexts of the 1671 Poems," in *The Oxford Handbook of Milton*, ed. Nicholas McDowell and Nigel Smith (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009), 571-88, at 576-7 and 580.

foregoing chapters all pick up on the vision of decline that Rochester (as Jonathan Kramnick has explained) saw corroborated in classical materialism: "all complex entities are ready at all times to return to their smaller and insentient units."[2] The Whig poets correlate such degeneration with Rochester's own pose, his libertine will to sexual and political power. Their reaction makes the case that materialism at best traps human beings in the present and at worst relegates them to chaotic origins, all prior refinement undone. The Whigs write off libertine freedom as superficial—as acceptance of confinement in decaying bodies—and advocate instead a dynamic and more or less individualized ascent to spirit.

While detailing the different patterns that such ascent could follow, I have tried to bring out the persistence of what Abigail Williams (whose study ends at 1714) describes as an "enormous optimism about the future of Whig poetry."[3] Yet I've also sought to uncover the anxieties that accompany the Whig dreams of futurity. Elizabeth Rowe, Edward Young, and Mark Akenside are haunted in various ways by the continuing lure of the body and the soil, the lure of georgic modes of writing and work, of local rather than galactic economies, of normal patterns of progress and regular powers of perception—haunted by the prospect, in a word, of return. My focus has been on philosophical and theological articulations of this danger. From the vantage point of the aspiring soul, return spells descent back down the scale of being. No doubt the Whig poets' fear of repetition is, at the same time, an enduring

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[2] Jonathan Kramnick, *Actions and Objects from Hobbes to Richardson* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2010), 83. For a different reading of Epicureanism as foundational for neoclassicism and for intellectual culture more generally in Restoration England, see Richard W. F. Kroll, *The Material Word: Literate Culture in the Restoration and Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1991). "For an influential group of English thinkers and writers," Kroll claims, "Epicureanism articulated a cultural model that they felt to symbolize a resistance to cultural fragmentation (associated with the Civil War) on the one hand, and tyranny (associated with the radical sects or Louis XIV's France) on the other" (9).

[3] Abigail Williams, *Poetry and the Creation of a Whig Literary Culture 1681-1714* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2005), 241.

disquiet about the prospect of political return to Stuart rule. Either way, though, their optimism has to account for the possibility that they will get the change they say they want. If our minds are made for unrelenting newness, then even a hard-won innovation (say a new royal lineage) runs the risk of growing tiresome. The imperatives of the new, that is, set up repetitions of their own. We are still coming to grips with the ecological, economic, and spiritual costs of modern capitalism's ideology of newness, with its proliferating cravings and novelties to match. But as this example might indicate, such an ideology is especially powerful because it can (from a sufficiently abstract perspective) appear to win no matter what happens. If it triumphs in its present form, then its terms persist as further changes are established and celebrated; if its present form falters, then the ideology gets to take credit for conjuring new alternatives in advance. It may be that, like it or not, we're all Whigs now.

In literary-historical terms, the achievement of the Whig poetry of exponential futures may be gauged by the fact that today's readers are much more familiar with its own future than they are with its origins. In reconceiving Milton, for instance, the Whig poets built an early foundation for romantic Miltonism. As Rowe and Young say quite candidly, forging a changed future in one sense—establishing it—often enough involves forging it in another—making it up. The Whig poets constructed a future for Milton in part by acting on the criticism, leveled persistently in the first half of the eighteenth century, that *Paradise Regain'd* was too confined a work of art. Though Samuel Johnson could declare that the poem had "been too much depreciated," he also saw fit to repeat the commonplace

judgment that "the basis of *Paradise Regained* is too narrow."[4] Earlier commentators were less forgiving. Samuel Wesley for one, an early participant in John Dunton's Athenian Society (hence a figure with ties to Rowe's literary networks) and father to the famous brothers John and Charles,[5] traced the poem's purportedly constricted scope to the poet's declining powers: "As for his Paradise Regain'd, I nothing wonder that it has not near the Life of his former Poem, any more than the Odysses [*sic*] fell short of the Iliads. Milton, when he writ this, was grown Older, probably poorer: He had not that scope for Fable, was confin'd to a lower Walk, and draws out that in four Books which might have been well compriz'd in one." Wesley had his own axe to grind, of course. His largely dismissive response to *Paradise Regain'd* appears as he advertises a poem of his own, *The Life of Christ*. Wesley wants to outdo Milton by taking in the full sweep of the Son of God's story: his subject is "the Redemption of the World, which was not accomplis'd till after our Saviours death and Resurrection."[6] Still, Wesley's complaint about narrowness can stand for many others. As Joseph Wittreich has written, Thomas Newton's 1751 edition of *Paradise Regain'd* entrenches the idea that (to quote two of the critical responses that Newton himself quotes) the poem offers an excess of "sameness" and was "cramp'd down by a more barren and contracted subject" than its predecessor. Wittreich contends that it took John Hayley's *Life of Milton* (1794) to open up a

[4] Samuel Johnson, "Milton," in *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets; with Critical Observations on Their Works*, ed. Roger Lonsdale, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 242-95, at 292.
[5] See Helen Berry, *Gender, Society, and Print Culture in Late Stuart England: The Cultural World of the "Athenian Mercury"* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 19, 24.
[6] Samuel Wesley, *Samuel Wesley's "Epistle to a Friend concerning Poetry" (1700) and "Essay on Heroic Poetry" (second edition, 1697)*, intro. Edward N. Hooker (Los Angeles: Augustan Reprint Society, 1947), 23-25.

new understanding of *Paradise Regain'd* and a new awareness of its integrity.[7] Yet before any romantic writers could decide that the brief epic was expansive after all, the poem had already been, in effect, reimagined to satisfy the demand for more room. The Whig poets discussed above all implicitly agree with Wesley that a poem of redemption that ends with a god-man on the ground is too cramped and contracted. They likewise discount Milton's call for a patient earthbound Son, an embodied hero who returns to his mother's house because his ministry is still being prepared. Rowe, Young, and Akenside take their responses further, however. In their poetry human souls become divine and find limitless space far away from the maternal home that is the material earth.

A number of other romantic figures might be adduced to confirm the unacknowledged resilience of the Whig poets' vision. One might look to Erasmus Darwin, another poet-physician and an admirer of Akenside, who found a goad to literary experimentation in the belief that striving individuals may contribute to "a gradual progress of life toward higher levels of organization and greater mental powers." Peter Bowler observes that "Darwin developed [these] ideas not from a study of natural history but from his medical interests, which had led him to examine David Hartley's account (1749) of how the habits of life affected the soul."[8] But Darwin had also closely examined Akenside's verse.[9] The enthusiastic push beyond human limits might also lead one to the cautionary

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[7] Joseph Anthony Wittreich, introduction to *Milton's "Paradise Regained": Two Eighteenth-Century Critiques*, by Richard Meadowcourt and Charles Dunster (Gainesville, FL: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1971), v-xv, at ix and xi.

[8] Peter J. Bowler, *Evolution: The History of an Idea*, 3rd rev. ed. (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2003), 86.

[9] According to Anna Seward, Darwin "ever maintained a preference of Akenside's blank verse to Milton's," and Seward herself went so far as to call *The Pleasures of Imagination* "the most splendid metaphysic poem in any language." See Anna Seward, *Memoirs of the Life of Dr. Darwin* (London: J. Johnson, 1804), 384; and *Letters of Anna Seward: Written between the Years 1784 and 1807*, ed. Archibald

case of Victor Frankenstein, who according to Captain Walton "has a double existence: he may suffer misery, and be overwhelmed by disappointments; yet when he has retired into himself, he will be like a celestial spirit, that has a halo around him, within whose circle no grief or folly ventures."[10] Or one might return to William Wordsworth, in particular to "Tintern Abbey." To gain new measures of harmony and happiness, the poet needs to escape the heavy weight of the "unintelligible world," matter being understood once again as both inert and (apart from some secret charm that the poet might unlock) incomprehensible. A process of provisional separation allows the affections to swell until the poet and his audience "are laid asleep | In body, and become a living soul." The soul becomes the self, and enhanced perceptual powers allow either poet or reader to "see into the life of things." Material objects give way to reflection upon the mind's own workings, and the autonomous mind can once more recognize matter for what it truly is. Wordsworth too admits that all of this may "be but a vain belief," and he too refuses to give it up. Many readers remain drawn to this poet because he depicts redemption near at hand, a heaven in the here and now. But in its way "Tintern Abbey" keeps within the gravity of the earth the same configuration of detachment, ascent, and new insight that Wordsworth could see in Rowe, Young, and Akenside. To be sure, Wordsworth does comparatively more to guarantee that he has a functional body to return to: during his soul's provisional detachment, his breath and blood

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Constable, 6 vols. (Edinburgh: A. Constable, 1811), 6:247. Both are quoted in Robin Dix, introduction to *The Poetical Works of Mark Akenside*, ed. Dix (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 1996), 13-81, at 27.

[10] Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818), ed. D.L. Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf, 2nd ed. (Peterborough: Broadview, 1999), 61.

are only "almost suspended."[11] Perhaps this is to say that Wordsworth hedges his bets a bit; the separable soul still flies, only now with clipped wings.

In closing, though, I'd like to look more closely at a different romantic author and a related romantic moment. The author is Anna Letitia Barbauld, who has become a decisive figure in critical efforts to recalibrate romanticism over the past twenty years or so.[12] Robert Miles, for instance, pairs Barbauld's poem "A Summer Evening's Meditation" with Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight" and calls the two "central to the foundation of British Romanticism."[13] For Jon Mee, Barbauld epitomizes a more specific negotiation that shaped romantic-era writing. Merely as a religious Dissenter, Mee writes, she was "liable to the charge of enthusiasm." As a female poet who sometimes sought to write in a traditionally male prophetic mode, Barbauld faced even more pressure to respect a boundary that kept "the religious or political sublime" from falling into "mere enthusiasm," the dangerous and (it was said) hysterical sectarianism affiliated with the 1640s.[14] Surveying the range of her responses, Mee contends that in early works, "A Summer Evening's Meditation" among

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[11] William Wordsworth, "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey," in *Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems, 1797-1800*, ed. James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1992), 116-20, at lines 40-51. On romantic poetry and suspended bodily activity, see Robert Mitchell, "Suspended Animation, Slow Time, and the Poetics of Trance," *PMLA* 126 (2011): 107-22.

[12] For a few notable examples in a now voluminous literature, see Anne K. Mellor, "A Criticism of Their Own: Romantic Women Literary Critics," in *Questioning Romanticism*, ed. John Beer (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1995), 29-48; William McCarthy, "'We Hoped the *Woman* Was Going to Appear': Repression, Desire, and Gender in Anna Letitia Barbauld's Early Poems," in *Romantic Women Writers: Voices and Countervoices*, ed. Paula R. Feldman and Theresa Kelley (Hanover, NH: Univ. Press of New England, 1995), 113-37; William Keach, "Barbauld, Romanticism and the Survival of Dissent," *Essays and Studies* 51 (1998): 44-61; Lucy Newlyn, *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000); and Daniel White, *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006).

[13] Robert Miles, "Romanticism, Enlightenment, and Mediation: The Case of the Inner Stranger," in *This Is Enlightenment*, ed. Clifford Siskin and William Warner (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2010), 173-88, at 177.

[14] Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Politics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2003), 175, 212.

them, Barbauld allies herself with "a poetics of unworlding" that she inherited from "Akenside, Young, and others."[15] I've tried to help establish Rowe as a neglected contributor to that pedigree. Barbauld herself seemed to agree. The book in which the "Meditation" first appeared, *Poems* (1773), also included a poem called "Verses on Mrs. Rowe."[16] In the poem, which bears an epigraph from Young's *Night Thoughts*, Barbauld asks Rowe to be her muse, and she teases out an aspect of Rowe's career I have likewise emphasized: although "she gives up all her soul to heavenly flames," Barbauld writes, nonetheless "she lov'd the work, and only shun'd the praise."[17] Certainly the literary culture of Dissent reaches back from Barbauld to take in Akenside, Rowe, and the Restoration Milton.[18] Nor is the churchman Young a stranger to this culture. Rowe dedicated her epistolary work *Friendship in Death* (1728) to him, as I've mentioned, giving thanks to an accomplished religious poet for "the Pleasure and Advantage I have received from your Poem on the LAST JUDGMENT, and the Paraphrase on Part of the Book of JOB."[19] A mutual friend linking Young and Rowe was Isaac Watts, who wrote in his copy that the *Paraphrase on Part of the Book of Job* was "the finest Descriptive Poem I ever read," but also did its author the service of proposing several

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[15] Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 194.
[16] In the standard modern edition of Barbauld's poetry, "Verses on Mrs. Rowe" appears just before "A Summer Evening's Meditation." See *The Poems of Anna Letitia Barbauld*, ed. William McCarthy and Elizabeth Craft (Athens, GA: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1994), 79-84.
[17] Anna Letitia Barbauld, "Verses on Mrs. Rowe," in *Poems*, ed. McCarthy and Craft, lines 26 and 28.
[18] For a brief treatment of Rowe as a transitional figure between Restoration Dissent and what became early romanticism, see Sharon Achinstein, *Literature and Dissent in Milton's England* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003), 247-55.
[19] [Elizabeth Rowe], *Friendship in Death. In Twenty Letters from the Dead to the Living* (London: T. Worrall, 1728), iii-iv.

emendations to the text.[20] In general, Young's religious verse carries forward the summons that Watts makes in the enlarged edition of *Horae Lyricae* (1709) for a new sublime poetry at once biblical, English, and modern.

Mee's treatment of the late eighteenth century stresses that even though enthusiasm was gradually rehabilitated, enthusiastic verse still had to be policed, quarantined from the unruly masses. One might easily enough read this argument back to the precedent-setting poems of Rowe, Young, and Akenside, each of whom in different ways responds to pressure to return to regulated social life. These Whig poets, the claim would go, capitulate in the end to the governing strictures of decorum. But to say as much would be to conclude that in returning to the present these writers opt to leave the future's resources where they lie, in a neatly circumscribed playland. I've tried to establish—to the contrary—that their project involved salvaging for present cultural use some store of the changes they imagined in an all-spiritual future. The Whig poets make their peace with descent only to the degree that they think they can actualize some of futurity's heavenly difference on earth. It's because of this urgency (more than the mandates of polite society) that their counter-Enlightenment hunger for newness could be reconciled with Enlightenment culture's own drive for new knowledge, experiences, and markets.

Barbauld's "Summer Evening's Meditation" can serve as a culmination, a *summa*, of this earlier Whig verse. The author prefaces her poem with an epigraph from Night IX of Young's *Night Thoughts*: "One sun by day, by night ten thousand shine."[21] The sun has set

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[20] Both the praise and the suggested emendations (also sent to Young) may be seen in Watts's annotated copy of E[dward] Young, *A Paraphrase on Part of the Book of Job*, 2nd ed. (London: J. Tonson, 1719); held at Dr. Williams's Library in London.

[21] See McCarthy and Craft, notes to Barbauld, *Poems*, 270.

and a mood of contemplation spreads as the poem opens. Soon Barbauld equates the brightening stars with angelic life forms: "One by one, the living eyes of heaven | Awake." These are "friendly lamps" meant "to point our path, and light us to our home."[22] Our angel guides, she adds, lead us with sound as well as sight: there is "a tongue in every star that talks with man, | And wooes him to be wise" ("SEM," 49-50). As in Milton's "Il Penseroso," nighttime is the time for reflection, but Barbauld's night thoughts turn, like Young's, to the soul that somehow does the thinking:

> At this still hour the self-collected soul
> Turns inward, and beholds a stranger there
> Of high descent, and more than mortal rank;
> An embryo GOD; a spark of fire divine,
> Which must burn on for ages, when the sun,
> (Fair transitory creature of a day!)
> Has clos'd his golden eye[.] ("SEM," 53-9)

Miles registers uncertainty about what Barbauld means by "self-collected soul." The critic suspects that "soul" here can be either "an everyman" or, if "taken literally," "a condition of the transported self."[23] He doesn't allow that the "stranger" seen by the soul is itself: a stranger to the matter in which it resides, an immaterial substance that makes seeing and thinking possible. "Turns inward," I am suggesting, can be read as "examines itself," for inspiration allows the mind to recognize itself as other than the body. As the poet's

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[22] Anna Letitia Barbauld, "A Summer Evening's Meditation," in *Poems*, ed. McCarthy and Craft, lines 25-26, 37, and 39; hereafter abbreviated "SEM" and cited parenthetically in the text by line numbers.
[23] Miles, "Romanticism, Enlightenment, and Mediation," 178.

reflections move from external angelic light to her own mind's workings, she is startled to remember that such an immaterial substance is at once the true subject of these thoughts and an angelic creature in its own right, made in heaven (again the doctrine of preexistence slips in) and made to rise as a god, outside the bodily purchase of a threadbare sun. Having seen heavenly beings both outward and inward, the poet reunites the two by envisioning a future moment when her soul is her whole self:

> Ye citadels of light, and seats of GODS!
> Perhaps my future home, from whence the soul
> Revolving periods past, may oft look back
> With recollected tenderness, on all
> The various busy scenes she left below[.] ("SEM," 61-65)

The ascendant soul will retain all its memories of embodied life. It will continue to express active concern for human life on earth, for (as Peter Walmsley says of Rowe's *Friendship in Death*) even "death cannot sever the ties of love."[24] To put it another way, the backward glance in these lines reveals that the realm of matter continues to hold a mysterious sway over the soul that escapes it.

It shouldn't surprise us to discover that imagining this future scene isn't enough for Barbauld. No sooner does she voice her longing for it to be "lawful *now* | To read the hallow'd circles of your courts" than she becomes possessed—"Seiz'd in thought"—and takes flight ("SEM," 68-69, 71; emphasis added). For the next forty lines of the poem, the soul-speaker soars from the earth, "launch[ing] into the trackless deeps of space," where

[24] Peter Walmsley, "Whigs in Heaven: Elizabeth Rowe's *Friendship in Death*," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 44 (2011): 315-30, at 325.

Young's "ten thousand suns appear" ("SEM," 82-83). Barbauld calls these angels the "first-born of creation," lower only than God himself on the scale of being ("SEM," 87). Remarkably, she adapts a Pauline characterization of Christ to describe instead the angelic beings whose power she can now wield—like drawn to like. Once again the divinized soul gets to soar, like Milton's Satan, through Chaos. She is propelled

> To solitudes of vast unpeopled space,
> The desarts of creation, wide and wild;
> Where embryo systems and unkindled suns
> Sleep in the womb of chaos[.] ("SEM," 94-97)

In the desert solitudes of space, the soul can revolve the possibility of endlessness. An "embryo GOD" alights upon "embryo systems," and with this shift from microcosm to macrocosm the scale of human imagination radically expands. The movement from chaos to new creation, however, is a passage through a womb, and that womb stuns the poet with a reminder of the divine creator. At the very thought of encountering him, "fancy droops, | And thought astonish'd stops" ("SEM," 97-98). Now resembling Milton's Satan in a different context, the speaker pauses while on high and panics at the memory of God's "dread perfection" ("SEM," 102). Despite her efforts to convince herself that God is no longer (as in days of old) the vengeful deity who with "fear appall'd | The scatter'd tribes," her own "abash'd" anxiety about "behold[ing] her Maker" is what begins to sink her ("SEM," 108-9, 111). Her fear of a return to heavenly origins is inseparable from her fear of punishment. In response, the soul, "unus'd to stretch her powers | In flight so daring," descends back to her "known accustom'd spot" ("SEM," 112-13, 114). There she can find

contentment with a place that in its own way is "full replete with wonders," where she can "wait th' appointed time | And ripen for the skies" ("SEM," 117-19). Back in (or at least nearer to) her earthly body, the soul can find pleasure in the imaginative charms of a familiar planet.

According to Mee, in this act of descent the poet satisfies the demands of a social sphere that regulates private (especially dissenting) enthusiasm. One alternative, a pious reading that Barbauld at times might have wished to promote, is that her soul's flight into new possibility ends when she determines that it is motivated by satanic pride, the presumption to be a god. Yet her poem never suggests that a remade earth is in fact the believer's final home. Nor does the poem deny that the soul's destiny is to become (once again) divinized and to gain new glories among fellow heavenly beings. Barbauld merely defers that destiny for a while. The resulting stretch of ripening time is the space of opportunity for a confident poet, one whose warranted pride led her to believe that she could outdo her predecessors in this mode in both originality and exuberance.[25] A second alternative is to propose that Barbauld, by comparison to the earlier Whig poets, proves more willing to return to the earth because she has a broader vision of the newness that's available in material life. She might be thought, that is, to contribute to the romantic recovery of Milton's materialism. Joseph Priestley was no doubt at the vanguard, arguing (quite in line with the mortalist Milton) that "the human being was entirely material," that the whole person dies when the body does, and that at the Resurrection "the whole person is raised to new life." Summarizing Priestley's views, William McCarthy acknowledges that in

[25] See Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 193-94.

the early 1770s Barbauld may have been warming to them. But McCarthy also explains that "late in life she conceived the problem in the more conventional dualist terms that posit a material body animated by a spirit-mind."[26] Her later dualism furthermore allowed for the movement of individual creatures up the scale of being. McCarthy quotes a whimsical letter from January 1815 in which the poet thanks a friend for giving her a Christmas turkey. Though the turkey's bodily life has now ended, Barbauld writes, "I cannot tell where the spirit went; but I hope it is animating some other vehicle, and rising by degrees in the scale of existence, till perhaps it may come at length (who knows) to eat turkeys itself."[27] Whereas in "A Summer Evening's Meditation" Barbauld may return the soul to the earth in part because of an inchoate materialism, at the end of her career more than ever she needs a separable spirit to portray ascent. If so, this writer of blank verse recapitulates within a single poetic career the sweep of materialism as it moved from Milton's late poetry to the poems of Rowe, Young, and Akenside.

If romanticism means this-worldly redemption, then it's only in a heavily qualified sense that what Barbauld's soul establishes, by descending for a while back to the body and the accustomed earth, is early romanticism. The poetry with which I've been concerned has at various times (and with varying degrees of comfort) been styled preromantic. Probably that designation still does useful work, passé though it is. The Whig poets are preoccupied with the future, after all, claiming that the bodily present they inhabit is insufficient to the needs of spirit. Thus the souls in their verse keep pushing ahead, plundering the reserves of a

[26] William McCarthy, *Anna Letitia Barbauld: Voice of the Enlightenment* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2008), 525-26.
[27] Quoted in McCarthy, *Anna Letitia Barbauld*, 526.

sanctified tomorrow and a bottomless heaven in advance. In our own day, when some prominent poets and critics argue that we should reread romanticism as a foundation and a locus of energy for later avant-gardist and experimental poetry,[28] we shouldn't cease repeating that the romantics' realized futurities came with histories of their own. The term *preromantic* can reinforce that vital point. But a danger with applying the label to Rowe, Young, and Akenside is that we might correspondingly view the souls in their poetry as free to soar ahead untroubled to romanticism and to secular modernity. We might underestimate the embeddedness of their verse within a religiously articulated culture and a religiously conceived polity. The more closely we explore the distinctive challenges these writers faced and the responses they proposed—the more attuned we are to the contingencies of the protracted reaction against the Stuart court and the intellectual currents associated with it—the more compelling is an analysis of this age "not [. . .] as anticipating a modernized future but as imbricated in its pasts."[29] If Rowe, Young, and Akenside, then, are preromantic writers, they are even more markedly post-Restoration ones. In their disposition they are recognizably modern: anxious, impatient, acquisitive, and uneasy with their own era. But they achieve their modernity, such as it is, by opposing the cultural threats they can still identify with Milton's chief political enemies, and by elaborating a future that presupposes the deep past of immortal souls. While my study does validate the current trend in British

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[28] For a bracing manifesto, see the introduction to Jerome Rothenberg and Jeffrey C. Robinson, eds., *The University of California Book of Romantic & Postromantic Poetry*, vol. 3 of *Poems for the Millennium* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2009), 1-18.

[29] Simon During, *Exit Capitalism: Literary Culture, Theory, and Post-Secular Modernity* (Abington: Routledge, 2010), 3-4. During attributes this broad conception of the long eighteenth century to historians such as J.C.D. Clark and J.G.A. Pocock, and he rightly observes that "these revisionist accounts, whose impulse has indubitably been conservative but whose insights need not be contained within conservatism, have only been spottily absorbed by literary historians" (4).

romantic studies to reach back to Enlightenment-era writing, it also offers a basis from which students of early eighteenth-century Whig poetry can reach ahead.

The romantic moment I wish to revisit is Barbauld's effort in 1794 (the year when Hayley's *Life of Milton* appeared) to envisage possible futures for both Young and Akenside. In a critical essay introducing her new edition of *The Pleasures of Imagination*, Barbauld juxtaposes the two poets and then speculates about how they will be read in time to come. In one of Akenside's odes, she thinks she detects a jab at Young's *Night Thoughts*: Akenside writes in the poem that the muse "flies from ruins and from tombs, | From Superstition's horrid glooms." Barbauld replies that such apparent "antipathy is not surprising: for never were two Poets more contrasted." Akenside, she argues, "had more of taste and judgment, YOUNG more of originality." She goes on to underline what she takes to be Young's Calvinist gloominess, "to which system however," she concedes, "he owed some of his most striking beauties." (Unlike Aaron Hill, Barbauld understands that Young can't achieve heat without a contrasting coldness.) To her, Young "resembles the Gothic" and Akenside the "Grecian architecture." She concludes that the former "has been read with deep interest by many who, when they have abandoned the tenets of orthodoxy can scarcely bear to re-peruse him."[30] Akenside can't match him for depth of impression, she allows, but the sublimity of Young is also more theologically confining and hence blocks itself off from readers who no longer identify with orthodox Christianity. Barbauld performs the old literary-critical trick of phrasing a contentious prediction as an account of what's already happened. In her telling the Anglican evangelist Young has become too narrow, and the

[30] Anna Letitia Barbauld, "Essay on Akenside's Poem," in *The Pleasures of Imagination: To which is Prefixed a Critical Essay on the Poem, by Mrs. Barbauld* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1794), 1-36, at 14-15.

power of *Night Thoughts* is already becoming a relic of a more dogmatic past. She positions herself as speaking for a changing culture, that is, and she foretells that in the wake of such changes Young will be accessible only to the vanishing few who share his version of orthodoxy. She goes on to propose that the sunnier and broader-minded sublimity of the dissenter Akenside, by strong contrast, will thrive.[31] She accepts that Akenside is not "one of those few born to *create* an era in Poetry"; nonetheless, she writes, "we may venture to predict that his work, which is not formed on any local or temporary subject, will continue to be a classic in our language; and we shall pay him the grateful regard which we owe to genius exerted in the cause of liberty and philosophy, of virtue and of taste."[32] A rejection of dogmatism makes Akenside (spatially and temporally) the more universal figure, and this quality will establish his poem—the one that Barbauld has edited for another generation of readers—as a classic in a language that has its own aspirations to universality. Imagining these divergent futures for Young and Akenside, she means to contribute to them.

I've focused on commonalities between these two Whig poets, however, and as it happened their fortunes followed a shared path. Both writers had fallen into disfavor by late-Victorian England, Young's decline helped along in some quarters by George Eliot's excoriation of him,[33] and neither poet was restored in an authoritative scholarly edition until the end of the twentieth century. Such an edition of the poems of Rowe, Barbauld's nearly

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[31] On this preference for Akenside's sublimity over Young's, see also Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 190-95; and William Keach, "Poetry, after 1740," in *The Eighteenth Century*, ed. H.B. Nisbet and Claude Rawson, volume 4 of *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997), 117-66, at 142-43.

[32] Barbauld, "Essay on Akenside's Poem," 36; partially quoted by Dix, introduction to *Poetical Works of Mark Akenside*, 28.

[33] [George Eliot], "Worldliness and Other-Worldliness: The Poet Young," *Westminster Review*, n.s., 11 (Jan. 1857): 1-42. Where Barbauld had opposed Akenside's cheer to Young's gloom, Eliot presents William Cowper's genuine love as an antidote to Young's deficient human sympathy.

forgotten muse, still doesn't exist and maybe never will.[34] Meanwhile, John Rogers notes that even Milton's devoted admirers "seem often to be searching for some *excuse* for Milton's composition of the briefer, less lively, 'epic' *Paradise Regained*."[35] I've described three eighteenth-century Whig poets as fixated for their part on Milton's brief epic, but fixated in that they needed somehow to efface it and rewrite it. In lieu of a provisionally human Son on the ground, their verse portrays divinized souls in the future's space. But all of these are works we need help to remember. Barbauld's critical essay can remind us of what it was like to believe, for example, that Akenside wrote one of the few poems in English that will always be read and applauded, and her essay can remind us of the effort it took to dislodge Young's *Night Thoughts* from a place of cultural prominence. Barbauld can also remind us that these Whig poets were thought to shape the tradition of blank verse that linked Milton's achievements with her own early experiments in the medium, which astonished her contemporaries.

The anti-materialist poetry of Rowe, Young, and Akenside attempts to draw on the riches of a virtual future. In its bearing, but not in its hope, this poetry diverges from literary criticism as it's normally practiced. Critical writing tends to mine the quarry of the past for the sake of present awareness and innovation. Its practitioners look backward rather than forward, but they likewise survey other times to address current problems, whether intellectual (as in a scholarly question) or institutional (as in a tenure case). Rather too often,

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[34] Recounting the publication history of Rowe's verse, Paula Backscheider discusses the impassable difficulty of sorting out the poet's words from later editorial manipulations; her conclusion is that "there will probably never be an authoritative edition." *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and Their Poetry: Inventing Agency, Inventing Genre* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2005), 114.

[35] John Rogers, "*Paradise Regained* and the Memory of *Paradise Lost*," in *The Oxford Handbook of Milton*, ed. Nicholas McDowell and Nigel Smith (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009), 589-612, at 590.

this strategy involves critics in scanning the past for earlier versions of themselves or else for foils that can ratify what they currently know of themselves. The labor of criticism doesn't have to settle with explicating what was present to the past, though. It doesn't have to rest content with reenacting some past's present in its own. The help we so often need is the shock of the uncanny, the recognition that some futures forged long ago both resemble our time and don't. Futures do come unmoored, after all, from the worlds in which they're dreamed up. Yet criticism can strive to regain some of the futures of the past that have been lost, to distinguish them from subsequent visions that claimed them and that remain more familiar or more reassuring to us. Even if criticism can't quite inhabit those lost futures from the inside, it can try to perceive the changes they held in store for those who made haste to imagine them.

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